



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



THURSDAY — 26 MAY 2022

	International	National	Regional and Local
Events, Opportunities Go to articles	05/26 Day 92 of the Russia invasion 05/26 Ukraine pleads for more weapons 05/26 Anarchists join Ukraine's war effort 05/26 Albania offers ex-Soviet base to NATO 05/26 Russia prepares to seize western firms 05/26 Russians face shortages as sanctions bite 05/26 China foreign minister starts Pacific tour 05/26 Weary Europe fatalism toward monkeypox 05/26 Killed IRGC officer involved in brutal plots 05/26 Iran: 'industrial accident' near military site 05/25 Ukraine savages idea of concessions 05/25 Russia forces expand Donbas assault 05/25 Russia mercenaries face war crimes trial 05/25 Russia bolsters army, tightens Ukraine grip 05/25 China pushes for regular mass testing 05/25 China's top 2 leaders diverge on Covid 05/25 Viruses on hiatus during Covid are back 05/25 Philippines declare Marcos Jr president 05/25 Canada's refugee, asylum seekers 'road' 05/25 India jails Kashmiri leader to life in prison 05/25 Iran used secret UN records; evade probes 05/25 US: NKorea built up nuclear, missile power 05/24 Hungary: 'state of danger' over Ukraine war	05/26 Nationwide protests in wake Texas shooting 05/26 Fewer apply for jobless benefits 05/26 Hawaii highest rate new Covid cases 05/26 College enrollment crisis deepens 05/26 Big cities lost more residents in pandemic 05/25 Long Covid affects more older adults 05/25 Schools, colleges reimpose mask mandate 05/25 Latest Covid wave largely hidden from view 05/25 Hotels ditch daily room cleaning 05/25 Real estate frenzy over? Yes, but... 05/25 Rising rates batter mortgage lenders 05/25 Millions risk losing healthcare: Medicaid 05/25 CBO: high inflation persists into next year 05/25 Unionized Starbucks stores face hard work 05/25 FDA: hobbled response baby formula crisis 05/25 Other nations changed course on guns 05/25 Executive Order: federal policing reform 05/25 Justice Dept. police reform unfolds slowly 05/25 Haunting question: is any schoolchild safe? 05/25 Shootings up, states divided on gun control 05/25 CDC issues monkeypox travel advisory 05/25 California approves new water restrictions	05/25 Debate over local SRO reignited 05/25 Schools campus safety top concern 05/25 Puyallup 'emergency expelled' student 05/25 Threat locks down Blaine public schools 05/25 Sedro-Woolley steps up school security 05/25 Spokane public schools' safety protocol 05/25 Richland school district tightens security 05/25 Gov., Lt Gov. test positive for Covid 05/25 WA 'strongly recommend' masks indoors 05/25 Pierce Co. up to 'medium' CDC Covid level 05/25 Outbreaks Pierce Co. childcare facilities up 05/25 Pierce Co. safe parking pilot program 05/25 Tacoma Parks 'white staff only' meeting 05/25 Alaska Air pilots authorize future strike 05/25 Big-time Spokane events return 05/25 Yakima Co. okays large solar power farm 05/25 DEA collects 9,000lbs WA 'drug take back'
Cyber Awareness Go to articles	05/26 China sudden warnings about US hackers 05/26 State of cybersecurity report 2022 05/26 New ERMAC 2.0 Android malware 05/25 New ChromeLoader malware surge 05/25 Interpol massive 'Operation Delilah' 05/25 GoodWill 'ransomware with a cause' 05/25 CLOP ransomware activity spiked in April 05/25 New Linux-based ransomware 'Cheerscript' 05/25 Port of London website suffers DDoS attack 05/25 Pakistan shuts internet ahead of protests 05/25 Brexit leak site linked to Russian hackers	05/25 Remote work insider threat challenge 05/25 DDoS extortion flagged as REvil redux? 05/25 Banks face threats Russian cyberattacks 05/25 Identity-based attacks on companies surge	05/25 Conti leaks stolen Oregon county data
Terror Conditions Go to articles	05/26 Turkey officials: new ISIS leader captured 05/26 Taliban morality police target women 05/25 Taliban: mosque blast, minivan bombings 05/24 Israel foils Hamas terror cell attacks	05/26 Rise, fall environmentalist underground ELF 05/25 Brooklyn man convicted of backing ISIS	
Suspicious, Unusual Go to articles	05/25 Pakistan city fearful: 123.8deg. heatwave 05/25 Scientists mystified monkeypox outbreak	05/25 Underwater drone tracks CO2 Alaska gulf	05/25 Crystal Mountain extends ski season
Crime, Criminals Go to articles	05/25 El Salvador extends anti-gang emergency	05/26 Another Texas school 'violence threat' 05/25 Arrest: mass violence at school threat 05/25 Texas school shooter 05/25 Debunking Texas shooting viral rumors 05/25 Texted friend earlier: 'shoot up school' 05/25 Timeline of Texas school mass shooting 05/25 School shooting rattles rural Texas town 05/25 Officials: gunman in school about 40min. 05/25 Onlookers urged police charge: 'go in there' 05/25 Gunmen in mass school shootings 05/25 Columbine to Robb: 169 killed in shootings	05/25 Spokane PD active shooter protocol 05/25 WA recovers \$6.6M stolen in jobless claims 05/25 Seattle U District light rail station stabbings

[DISCLAIMER and FAIR USE Notice](#)

Events, Opportunities

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 Ukraine savages idea of concessions
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russian-official-calls-italian-peace-plan-ukraine-fantasy-2022-05-25/
GIST	<p>May 25 (Reuters) - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy on Wednesday savaged suggestions that Kyiv give up territory and make concessions to end the war with Russia, saying the idea smacked of attempts to appease Nazi Germany in 1938.</p> <p>The angry comments by Zelenskiy and a senior aide come as Ukrainian troops are facing a renewed offensive in two eastern regions that Russian-speaking separatists seized part of in 2014.</p> <p>The New York Times editorial board said on May 19 that a negotiated peace might require Kyiv to make some hard decisions, given that a decisive military victory was not realistic.</p> <p>And former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger this week suggested at the World Economic Forum in Davos that Ukraine should let Russia keep Crimea, which it annexed in 2014.</p> <p>"Whatever the Russian state does, you will always find someone who says 'Let's take its interests into account'," Zelenskiy said in a late night video address.</p> <p>"You get the impression that Mr Kissinger doesn't have 2022 on his calendar, but 1938, and that he thinks he is talking to an audience not in Davos but in Munich back then."</p> <p>In 1938, Britain, France, Italy and Germany signed a pact in Munich that gave Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler land in the then Czechoslovakia as part of a failed attempt to persuade him to abandon further territorial expansion.</p> <p>"Perhaps the New York Times also wrote something similar in 1938. But let me remind you, it's now 2022," said Zelenskiy.</p> <p>"Those who advise Ukraine to give something to Russia, these 'great geopolitical figures', never see ordinary people, ordinary Ukrainians, millions living on the territory they are proposing to exchange for an illusory peace."</p> <p>Italy and Hungary have urged the European Union to call explicitly for a ceasefire in Ukraine and peace talks with Russia, putting themselves at odds with other member states determined to take a hard line with Moscow. read more</p> <p>Earlier, in an expletive-filled tirade, Zelenskiy adviser Oleksiy Arestovych said some European nations clearly wanted Ukraine to make concessions to Putin.</p> <p>"No one is going to trade a gram of our sovereignty or a millimetre of our territory," he said in video remarks posted online. "Our children are dying, soldiers are being blown apart by shells, and they tell us to sacrifice territory. Get lost. It's never going to happen."</p> <p>Russia's foreign ministry spokeswoman earlier said an Italian peace plan for Ukraine was a "fantasy".</p> <p>"You can't supply Ukraine with weapons with one hand and come up with plans for a peaceful resolution of the situation with the other," Maria Zakharova said at her weekly briefing, referring to the Italian initiative.</p> <p>Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio gave the broad outlines of the plan last week. The Kremlin said on Tuesday it had not seen the initiative but hoped to receive it through diplomatic channels.</p> <p>Zakharova said of the reported proposal: "If they hope that the Russian Federation will seize on any Western plan, then they haven't understood much."</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/26 Russia prepares to seize western firms
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/russia-prepares-seize-western-firms-looking-leave-2022-05-26/
GIST	<p>May 26 (Reuters) - Russia is advancing a new law allowing it to take control of the local businesses of western companies that decide to leave in the wake of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, raising the stakes for multinationals trying to exit.</p> <p>The law, which could be in place within weeks, will give Russia sweeping powers to intervene where there is a threat to local jobs or industry, making it more difficult for western companies to disentangle themselves quickly unless they are prepared to take a big financial hit.</p> <p>The law to seize the property of foreign investors follows an exodus of western companies, such as Starbucks (SBUX.O), McDonald's (MCD.N) and brewer AB InBev (ABI.BR), and increases pressure on those still there.</p> <p>It comes as the Russian economy, increasingly cut-off due to western sanctions, plunges into recession amid double-digit inflation.</p> <p>Italian lender UniCredit (CRDI.MI), Austrian bank Raiffeisen (RBIV.VI), the world's biggest furniture brand, IKEA, fast food chain Burger King, and hundreds of smaller firms still have businesses in Russia. Any that try to leave face this tougher line.</p> <p>IKEA, which has paused all operations in Russia, said it was closely following the development. Raiffeisen, said it was assessing all options, including a carefully managed exit. UniCredit declined to comment while Burger King did not immediately respond to a request for comment.</p> <p>The bill paves the way for Russia to appoint administrators over companies owned by foreigners in "unfriendly" countries, who want to quit Russia as the conflict with Ukraine drags down its economy.</p> <p>Moscow typically refers to countries as "unfriendly" if they have imposed economic sanctions on Russia, meaning any firms in the European Union or United States are at risk.</p> <p>The European Commission proposed toughening its own stance on Wednesday to make breaking EU sanctions against Russia a crime, allowing EU governments to confiscate assets of companies and individuals that evade restrictions against Moscow.</p> <p>Meanwhile, in a move that could push Moscow closer to the brink of default, the Biden administration announced it would not extend a waiver that enabled Russia to pay U.S. bondholders.</p> <p>ECONOMIC PAIN</p> <p>The departures of western firms have angered Russian politicians. Former president Dmitry Medvedev, who is now deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council, has been a particularly vocal critic of western companies who left, attacking "enemies who are now trying to limit our development and ruin our lives".</p> <p>"The government is interested in preserving jobs and tax revenues," said Sergej Suchanow, a lawyer with risk management and compliance consultancy RSP International.</p> <p>"First and foremost, the government will apply the rules to big companies. To avoid an administrator, companies must show they are not leaving their Russian businesses in the lurch."</p> <p>Ulf Schneider, a consultant working with German companies in Russia and an expert in the region with Germany's mid-sized or 'Mittelstand' industry group BVMW, said he and others are working on proposals to allow foreign companies to voluntarily hand over control to a trustee of their choice.</p> <p>That could convince Russia they are being responsible while at the same time distancing themselves.</p> <p>"Sale is an option but the conditions for a sale are not good," Schneider said.</p>

The draft law outlines how Russia could appoint an administrator to firms where at least 25% of the shares are in "unfriendly" foreign hands.

It lays down a wide range of criteria for intervention, such as when a company plays a critical role as a local employer or provides important services. It makes clear that the state can justify taking control on many grounds.

The bill cites the example of companies making medical devices but also lists a host of other sectors, such as transport and energy, as well as any firm whose closure could push up shop prices.

The state-appointed administrator would also be allowed to sell the confiscated business, while its former owners would be barred from doing business in Russia.

A court or the Ministry of Economic Development could decide to put an administrator, such as Russia's development bank VEB, in charge.

The bill passed its first reading in the lower house of parliament, or Duma, this week but still faces two further readings and an upper house review before being signed by President Vladimir Putin into law.

That could take several weeks. Russia's economy ministry said it would pick out companies only in 'critical cases' where it was necessary to shield production or jobs.

Scores of foreign companies have announced temporary shutdowns of stores and factories in Russia since Putin launched what he calls a "special military operation" to demilitarise and "denazify" Ukraine, dismissed as a baseless pretext for the war by Ukraine and its allies.

"Russia was already isolated and no longer of interest to investors," said Michael Loewy of the Federation of Austrian Industries. "This law can only make that worse."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Fewer apply for jobless benefits
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/finance/streettalk/unemployment-benefits-decline-labor-market-inflation-post-pandemic-recovery/2022/05/26/id/1071610/
GIST	<p>Fewer Americans applied for jobless aid last week with the number of Americans collecting unemployment benefits already near five-decade lows.</p> <p>Applications for unemployment benefits fell by 8,000 to 210,000 for the week ending May 21, the Labor Department reported Thursday. First-time applications are generally representative of the number of layoffs.</p> <p>The four-week average for claims, which smooths out some of the weekly volatility, ticked up from the previous week to 206,750.</p> <p>The total number of Americans collecting jobless benefits for the week ending May 14 rose slightly from the previous week, to 1,346,000. Last week that number stood at 1,315,000, the fewest since in more than five decades.</p> <p>American workers are enjoying historically strong job security two years after the coronavirus pandemic plunged the economy into a short but devastating recession. Weekly applications for unemployment aid have been consistently below the pre-pandemic level of 225,000 for most of 2022, even as the overall economy contracted in the first quarter and concerns over inflation persist.</p> <p>Earlier this month, the government reported America's employers added 428,000 jobs in April, leaving the unemployment rate at 3.6%, just above the lowest level in a half-century. Hiring gains have been strikingly</p>

	<p>consistent in the face of the worst inflation in four decades, with employers adding at least 400,000 jobs for 12 straight months.</p> <p>Inflation may be the only thing hotter than the U.S. job market. Earlier this month, the government reported that U.S. producer prices soared 11% in April from a year earlier, a hefty gain that indicates high inflation will remain a burden for consumers and businesses in the months ahead.</p> <p>Inflation at the consumer level eased slightly in April after months of relentless increases but remained near a four-decade high. Consumer prices jumped 8.3% last month from a year ago, just below the 8.5% year-over-year surge in March, which was the highest since 1981.</p> <p>Earlier in May, the Federal Reserve intensified its fight against the worst inflation in 40 years by raising its benchmark short-term interest rate by a half-percentage point, signaling further large rate hikes to come. The increase in the Fed's key rate, its most aggressive move since 2000, raised it to a range of 0.75% to 1%, the highest point since the pandemic struck in March of 2020.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/26 Albania offers ex-Soviet base to NATO
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/nato-edi-rama-albania-1e6bcb874e6bb439b2004140d6ffa1a8
GIST	<p>TIRANA, Albania (AP) — Albania has offered NATO a naval base in an effort to highlight the small country's value in the alliance "in these difficult times," the prime minister's office said Thursday.</p> <p>Prime Minister Edi Rama said Pashaliman naval base, 180 kilometers (110 miles) south of the capital Tirana, could be "an added value" to the alliance and they had prepared a project on its renovation.</p> <p>"In these dangerous times I believe the general may consider having a NATO's naval base in Albania," Rama said in a speech Wednesday.</p> <p>Albania, which became a NATO member in 2009, has joined the United States and the European Union in denouncing Russia's war in Ukraine.</p> <p>The Pashaliman base located under the Vlora Bay was built in the 1950s when the Soviet Union brought 12 submarines, making it the only naval base they had in the Mediterranean. Following the breakdown of Tirana-Moscow ties in 1961, the Pashaliman remained as a naval base sheltering four remaining submarines and other small military ships.</p> <p>The base was looted, including material from the submarines, during the anarchic year of 1997 in Albania when Europe's then-poorest population lost its life savings in failed pyramid investment schemes. Three of the submarines were sold for scrap while the fourth one remains, with the government considering whether to turn it into a museum.</p> <p>Pashaliman was renovated by Turkey and since has been used as a naval base for some military ships patrolling the Ionian and Adriatic Seas.</p> <p>NATO also has started work to upgrade Albania's communist-era Kucove Air Base, 85 kilometers (53 miles) south of the capital Tirana, which will allow it to be used for alliance operations.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/25 Real estate frenzy over? Yes, but-
SOURCE	https://www.axios.com/2022/05/25/the-real-estate-frenzy-is-over
GIST	<p>Looks like America's home buying binge is winding down. There's a vibe shift visible in both the official data and in the anecdotal from sellers, buyers and brokers.</p> <p>Why it matters: This is just what Jerome Powell ordered. The slowdown means the Fed's rate hikes are working — cooling demand in an overheated market.</p>

"The buyers just stopped buying," said Shauna Pendleton, an agent with Redfin in Boise, Idaho, until recently one of the [hottest markets](#) in the country. "Californication," as she called it, drove an influx of buyers from the West coast, flush with cash courtesy of the also formerly booming stock market.

- Some listings now sit for weeks without even a showing, she said; like this [4-bedroom priced at \\$899,000](#); 42 days without a look-see.
- In the Dallas/Ft. Worth area, Redfin agent Robin Glaysheer said five people showed up to an open house last weekend; previously there would've been a line out the door.
- "It's a completely different market now," said Glaysheer, who works with homes priced around \$400,000.
- The change is a boon for some buyers — like those relying on FHA loans that require only 3.5% down, she said. In the old times they were often outbid by cash buyers, who have now vanished.

Driving the news: New home sales plunged in April, falling 16.6% from March to 591,000, well below economists' forecast of 750,000, according to data out Tuesday. It's the slowest pace since April 2020 — when the economy froze for a minute before the boom began.

- Existing home sales — perhaps a better measure of the U.S. market since it's a much larger segment — are also [trending down](#), falling for three straight months, according to the National Association of Realtors.
- Mortgage rates have soared since March and with the 30-year now hovering at around 5.25%, the highest it's been in years.
- Meanwhile, new housing supply is building. Available inventory of unsold new single family homes jumped by 8% in April to 444,000, a 13-year high.

Data: FactSet; Chart: Axios Visuals

Catch up quick: The real estate market has been, technically speaking, bananas since COVID, as the rise of remote work — and super-low mortgage rates — sent more people looking to upgrade their living space.

- The surge in demand fueled bidding wars and all kinds of wild activity — buyers waiving inspections or begging sellers to pick them, for example.
- Now, "buyers are less conciliatory, as far as giving whatever we want on the sell side," said Glaysheer, the Texas agent.

What they're saying: "The party is over," Ian Shepherdson, chief economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics, wrote in a research note Tuesday.

- "We were going 90 miles an hour down the highway, and we took our foot off the gas," Michael Simonsen, CEO of Altos, a real estate analytics firm, tells Axios.
- "The market's shifted from 'irrational to more rational," Jonathan Miller, a New York based real estate appraiser, tells Axios in an email. What used to sell in 24 hours, now could take about a month.

Yes, but: This isn't 2008. Home prices haven't started falling. The U.S. median new home price ticked up in April to \$450,600 — that's up 45% from two years ago.

- And though the supply of newly built homes has increased, that's actually a small part of the overall market. Inventories of existing homes are still [some of the lowest on record](#), as of April.

The bottom line: Though the frenzy is over, "there's still a lot of pent up demand from people who've been shopping for a year," Simonsen said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Hawaii highest rate new Covid cases
SOURCE	https://www.axios.com/2022/05/26/hawaii-reports-highest-rate-of-new-covid-cases
GIST	An ongoing surge of reported COVID cases in the northeast showed signs of easing even as cases continued to jump around the rest of the country.

Why it matters: While this data likely understates the actual number of cases, it's an indicator of [a "hidden wave"](#) of cases burning through social circles across the U.S. right now even as America fights to get back to normalcy.

- It comes as anecdotal reports of COVID among groups of friends, and a slew of confirmed cases of high profile individuals, most recently Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney and Washington Gov. Jay Inslee.

By the numbers: There were roughly 108,000 new daily cases over the last week, up 28% from about 84,500 two weeks ago.

- Hawaii had the highest case rate, reporting 71 new cases per 100,000 people over the last two weeks. It was one of more than a dozen states with 40 or more new cases per 100,000 people in that time period.
- States in the northeast continued to report some of the highest case rates in the nation even as they showed declines in their overall numbers over the past two weeks. Rhode Island, which reported a dip in overall cases, posted 69 new cases per 100,000 people.
- Connecticut, Illinois, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, Rhode Island and Wisconsin all reported drops.

Between the lines: Average deaths rose 1% over the past two weeks, staying at roughly 330 a day.

Reality check: The data on new cases is getting less reliable more people turn to home test results rather than publicly-reporting testing. But it still offers a window into the broad trends of COVID spread.

The bottom line: COVID is spreading. And as safety measures continue to take the back burner, viruses that were less prevalent during lockdowns have returned "in unexpected ways," [STAT reported](#) this week.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 Viruses on hiatus during Covid are back
SOURCE	https://www.statnews.com/2022/05/25/viruses-that-were-on-hiatus-during-covid-are-back-and-behaving-in-unexpected-ways/
GIST	<p>For nearly two years, as the Covid pandemic disrupted life around the globe, other infectious diseases were in retreat. Now, as the world rapidly dismantles the measures put in place to slow spread of Covid, the viral and bacterial nuisances that were on hiatus are returning — and behaving in unexpected ways.</p> <p>Consider what we've been seeing of late.</p> <p>The past two winters were among the mildest influenza seasons on record, but flu hospitalizations have picked up in the last few weeks — in May! Adenovirus type 41, previously thought to cause fairly innocuous bouts of gastrointestinal illness, may be triggering severe hepatitis in healthy young children.</p> <p>Respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV, a bug that normally causes disease in the winter, touched off large outbreaks of illness in kids last summer and in the early fall in the United States and Europe.</p> <p>And now monkeypox, a virus generally only found in West and Central Africa, is causing an unprecedented outbreak in more than a dozen countries in Europe, North America, the Middle East, and Australia, with the United Kingdom alone reporting more than 70 cases as of Tuesday.</p> <p>These viruses are not different than they were before, but we are. For one thing, because of Covid restrictions, we have far less recently acquired immunity; as a group, more of us are vulnerable right now. And that increase in susceptibility, experts suggest, means we may experience some ... wonkiness as we work toward a new post-pandemic equilibrium with the bugs that infect us.</p> <p>Larger waves of illness could hit, which in some cases may bring to light problems we didn't know these bugs triggered. Diseases could circulate at times or in places when they normally would not.</p>

“I think we can expect some presentations to be out of the ordinary,” said Petter Brodin, a professor of pediatric immunology at Imperial College London. “Not necessarily really severe. I mean it’s not a doomsday projection. But I do think slightly out of the normal.”

Marion Koopmans, head of the department of viroscience at Erasmus Medical Center in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, said she believes we may be facing a period when it will difficult to know what to expect from the diseases that we thought we understood.

“I do think that’s possible,” Koopmans said.

This phenomenon, the disruption of normal patterns of infections, may be particularly pronounced for diseases where children play an important role in the dissemination of the bugs, she suggested.

Little kids are normally germ magnets and germ amplifiers. But their lives were profoundly altered during the pandemic. Most went for stretches of time without attending day care, or in-person school. Many had far less exposure to people outside their households, and when they did encounter others, those people may have been wearing masks.

And babies born during the pandemic may have entered the world with few antibodies passed on by their mothers in the womb, because those mothers may have been sheltered from RSV and other respiratory pathogens during their pregnancies, said Hubert Niesters, a professor of clinical virology and molecular diagnostics at the University Medical Center, in Groningen, the Netherlands.

Koopmans said a study her team did looking for antibodies in the blood of young children showed the impact of what she calls an “infection honeymoon.”

“You really see that children in the second year of the pandemic have far less antibodies to a set of common respiratory viruses. They just got less exposed,” she said.

Such factors may help explain the recent rash of unusual hepatitis cases in young children. Scientists investigating the cases think they may be caused, at least in part, by adenovirus type 41, because it has been found in a significant number of the affected children. The possibility is puzzling, because the virus hasn’t been seen to cause this type of illness in the past.

But some scientists theorize that this virus may have always been responsible for a portion of the small number of unexplained pediatric hepatitis cases that happen every year. Maybe, the thinking goes, there have been a lot more adenovirus type 41 infections over the past eight months because of increased susceptibility among children. That, in turn, could be making visible something that wasn’t spotted before.

“I think sometimes to connect the dots of rare complications of common illnesses you just need enough cases out there to start to put the pieces together,” said Kevin Messacar, a pediatric infectious diseases specialist at Children’s Hospital Colorado. “And there is some suspicion that that could be going on with the hepatitis cases.”

The pandemic-induced disruption of normal mixing patterns means that even adults haven’t been generating the levels of antibodies that would normally be acquired through the regular exposure we have to bugs, creating ever larger pools of susceptible people.

Flu experts, for instance, worry that when influenza viruses return in a serious way, a buildup of people who haven’t had a recent infection could translate into a very bad flu season.

Koopmans said some studies suggest that after a one- or two-year period in which flu transmission is low, there could be a sizeable reduction in the number of people who have flu antibodies that are at levels high enough to be considered protective. “So also, potentially, a bigger, more susceptible group in adults,” she said.

“We’re talking about endemic diseases that had a certain pattern of predictability. And that pattern in part was seasonal but in part was also driven by the size of the immune or non-immune population. And the last bit has, of course, increased,” Koopmans said.

How will this play out? All eyes will be trained this fall on children’s hospitals to see whether there will be a surge in cases of a polio-like condition called acute flaccid myelitis, or AFM, which is thought to be caused by infection with enterovirus D68.

Messacar, who is also an associate professor at the University of Colorado, has been studying AFM for the past eight years, since the first of a series of biennial waves of cases occurred in the late summer and early autumn of 2014, 2016, and 2018.

Then in 2020, nothing. Same in 2021. Does that mean the fall of 2022 could see a much higher crest of cases, because more children are potentially susceptible to enterovirus D68? We need to be prepared for that possibility, Messacar said, while stressing he doesn’t know what to expect.

“Now we have four years of children who haven’t seen that virus. We don’t know what’s going to happen. We don’t know when it comes back. But when it does come back, there are more susceptible children out there that would not be expected to have immunity,” he said. “That’s what we’re watching with a variety of different viruses.”

Thomas Clark, deputy director of the division of viral diseases at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said people in public health have been fearing there could be outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases due to the fact that many children around the world missed getting childhood vaccinations during the pandemic.

But he said he now understands that isn’t the only way the pandemic may influence infectious diseases.

“We’re very focused on under-vaccinated children with routine childhood immunizations because it’s the set-up for introduction of measles. But then there have also been a lot of kids who haven’t gotten the usual kind of viruses they might have been exposed to.”

Clark said we may see differences in severity of some illnesses, because young children who were sheltered from bugs during the early stages of the pandemic may now catch them when they are older. Some illnesses cause more serious symptoms if they are contracted when one is older.

“Whether we will see that kind of thing over such a short period of time I think is a big question mark,” said Koopmans. “But I think it is certainly something that is worth really watching closely.”

An accumulation of susceptible people isn’t the only way the pandemic may have affected patterns of disease transmission, some experts believe.

David Heymann, who chairs an expert committee that advises the Health Emergencies Program at the World Health Organization, said the lifting of pandemic control measures could have helped fuel the spread of monkeypox in the current outbreak in Europe, North America, and beyond. Many of the monkeypox cases have been diagnosed in men who have sex with men.

After two years of limited travel, social distancing and public gatherings, people are throwing off the shackles of Covid control measures and embracing a return to pre-pandemic life. Media reports have suggested recent raves in Spain and Belgium have led to transmission of the virus among some attendees.

Heymann, who is a professor of infectious disease epidemiology at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, mused that the monkeypox outbreak could have been smoldering at low levels in the United Kingdom or somewhere else outside of Africa for quite a while, but may have only come to public attention when international travel picked up again.

	<p>“If you look at what’s been happening in the world over the past few years, and if you look at what’s happening now, you could easily wonder if this virus entered the U.K. two to three years ago, it was transmitting below the radar screen, [with] slow chains of transmission,” said Heymann, who worked on smallpox eradication early in his career. “And then all of a sudden everything opened up and people began traveling and mixing.”</p> <p>While all this could make for an unsettling time over the next couple of years, things will eventually quiet down, Brodin predicted.</p> <p>“I think once you’ve infected a number of people herd immunity ensues and the virus goes away,” he said, referring to viruses in generally. “We haven’t fundamentally changed the rules of infectious diseases.”</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/25 Pierce Co. safe parking pilot program
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3487427/pierce-county-adopts-safe-parking-pilot-program/
GIST	<p>The Pierce County Council adopted a plan to help end homelessness in the county on Tuesday, setting parking regulations for long-term parking. Pierce County Executive Bruce Dammeier intends to sign the legislation into law, he tells MyNorthwest.</p> <p>The pilot program will allow safe parking sites for a limited time while permanent rules are drafted, reviewed and submitted to the council for consideration.</p> <p>“This ordinance puts standards in place to protect the residents of safe parking and limits potential neighborhood impacts,” said councilmember Ryan Mello. “Without this ordinance, site operators won’t have the certainty they need to invest in the amenities and tools required to host safe parking.”</p> <p>Safe parking sites are allowed on land owned and controlled by a religious organization, and up to four limited-duration sites are allowed on civic or commercial property if a religious group, non-profit or government agency operates the site.</p> <p>A site can host any number of vehicles in all urban zones, subject to county approval that public health and safety standards are met.</p> <p>Sites hosted by religious organizations that serve up to seven vehicles are allowed in all zones in unincorporated Pierce County, while those hosting eight or more vehicles are allowed in urban zones.</p> <p>All sites must conduct public meetings to discuss neighborhood impact, and to review state and local sex offender registrations.</p> <p>The operator of the site has final say on who can stay.</p> <p>On-site restrooms, potable water, and trash receptacles must be provided, along with a safety and security plan and a resident code of conduct.</p> <p>“This is the cheapest, lowest-impact-to-the-community strategy from our adopted Comprehensive Plan to End Homelessness that we can do to help as many people as possible,” Mello said. “One-third of those experiencing homelessness in Pierce County have a car, and half of those have an income and just need a safe place to park while they try to secure stable housing. If we don’t legalize safe parking, we will continue to see people forced into unsafe places along highways and dead-end roads.”</p> <p>The plan hopes to support some of the estimated 2,300 unhoused people in the county.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/25 Tacoma Parks ‘white staff only’ meeting
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3485754/rantz-tacoma-parks-white-staff-only-supremacy/

Metro Parks Tacoma hosted a whites-only staff meeting to discuss white supremacy and how “white people can move from being allies to advocates.” The meeting was in response to the May 14 mass shooting in Buffalo, New York.

The department’s chief equity officer Norinda Rosario sent an all-staff email this week to alert white staff members of the upcoming one-hour meeting. It’s not required.

“I am holding space for White staff to connect and share their thoughts and feelings around the Buffalo Supermarket massacre that took the lives of 10 innocent Black people in Buffalo, NY, on Saturday, May 14. This is an invitation, not an expectation,” the email invite read.

When a staff member complained that this is divisive, Rosario shamed him publicly, saying she was glad it made him “cringe.”

This meeting demonized white staff

A spokesperson with Tacoma Parks explained to the Jason Rantz Show that these kinds of “affinity” group meetings — segregated get-togethers with people who share an identity — are common. And this one was to get white staff to become activists.

“The conversation for white folks was also intended to help grieve and process and heal, but also to share thoughts about racial violence and how white people can move from being allies to advocates – in a conversation space without risk of further traumatizing BIPOC colleagues,” the spokesperson emailed the Jason Rantz Show on KTTH.

It’s unclear how a conversation meant to grieve, process, and heal would traumatize non-white staff. But the implication is that, in this case, black employees are not able to handle conversations with white people, which the department is effectively demonizing here for not being “advocates.” It’s as if Tacoma Parks thinks its white employees support racially-motivated shootings.

They also held other meetings for non-white staff, but it included the demonization of white colleagues.

“There were several conversation times for black/BIPOC folks, and others for white folks,” the spokesperson emailed. “The intent behind the conversations for BIPOC folks was to create a process for healing, a space where people can talk freely, for black and brown staff to grieve and process this incident and the toll of racism as a whole without the risk of the conversation diverting to console white people and serve their needs instead.”

The meeting received immediate pushback as the staff was concerned that this was a partisan attempt to pit whites against blacks.

Workers were outraged

The email invite didn’t sit well with staff members. Some, according to a source, felt uncomfortable speaking out publicly. But one hit reply-all to the email.

“White staff? This doesn’t sit well with me separating fellow coworkers by skin color. It was a tragic event that took place, but I’d like to think we all fit under the same umbrella as Americans. Our hearts go out to those affected,” he wrote.

Equity director Rosario responded two days later to address the concern raised. She said she did not have time to put more details into the intent of her email, which she said she wished she had done. But she also scolded the man for expressing his concern.

“The Buffalo Massacre occurred on Saturday, May 14, and from that moment on, my focus was centered on the health and welfare of MPT’s Black staff, and not the comfort or needs of White people,” she wrote.

“My choice to include other People of Color was based on the likelihood that they too have experienced racial violence and that this incident has likely activated their anguish, anger, fear, and frustration as well.”

She then unloaded on the staff member, which she sent to all staff. She complained that she is “not a counselor or a therapist” but a “facilitator, advisor, guide, and coach.” But, she said she was glad she upset the staff member.

“I’m happy to know that reading the words White Staff Only makes some people cringe. It means that your heart is in the right place. But, I challenge you to do the work to understand why the practice of providing raced-based affinity groups is a powerful tool for healing.”

The resources paint white people as oppressors

Rosario defended the idea of affinity groups in her email, noting she understands that some people are new to the concept. She offered a number of links to resources explaining the benefits of these meetings.

One resource offers “anti-racist” tools for white staff members to use. It [defines](#) the space thusly: For white people, a caucus provides time and space to work explicitly and intentionally on understanding white culture and white privilege and to increase one’s critical analysis around these concepts. A white caucus also puts the onus on white people to teach each other about these ideas, rather than placing a burden on people of color to teach them.

Another [resource](#) defended racially segregated meetings, arguing all white people judge black people to the point that black expression and authenticity are hindered:

People of color need their own spaces. Black people need their own spaces. We need places in which we can gather and be free from the mainstream stereotypes and marginalization that permeate every other societal space we occupy. We need spaces where we can be our authentic selves without white people’s judgment and insecurity muzzling that expression. We need spaces where we can simply be—where we can get off the treadmill of making white people comfortable and finally realize just how tired we are.

If this is how Rosario views white employees at Tacoma Parks, it’s no wonder staff complained.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Russians face shortages as sanctions bite
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/05/26/russia-economy-aviation-sanctions-shortages/
GIST	<p>Stung by Western sanctions, Russia is starting to devolve into a secondhand economy dependent on poor substitutes, where shortages are stirring memories of the consumer wasteland that was the Soviet Union.</p> <p>While it may be able to find new purveyors for some Western-made goods and components in friendly countries such as China and India, Russia is increasingly determined to make its own — returning to policies of import substitution that yielded a vast, if globally uncompetitive, industrial complex before the fall of the Berlin Wall.</p> <p>Already, Moscow is facing serious challenges.</p> <p>Unable to secure spare parts from Western airplane manufacturers, for instance, the Russian aviation sector is facing a crisis. About 80 percent of Russia’s commercial fleet consists of foreign-made planes, predominantly from Airbus and Boeing, both of which have stopped doing business with Moscow.</p> <p>Ural Airlines, which has over 50 Airbus planes, has projected that it can safely fly them for only a few months before it will need to start “cannibalizing” from other aircraft — permanently grounding some planes to strip them for parts. The low-cost airline Pobeda, part of the state-run Aeroflot group, has already reduced its fleet from 41 to 25 planes, using its grounded aircraft for “cannibalized” parts.</p> <p>The decision by Ericsson and Nokia to freeze business with Russia, meantime, has left cellular providers there suddenly scouring the world for used towers and parts to maintain and expand a network that had</p>

more or less kept pace with the United States and Europe. Even China's Huawei appears reluctant to fill the gap, indefinitely delaying a Russian rollout of next-generation 5G technology, a service that providers had been testing before the Ukraine invasion.

"Within five years, there will be a huge gap between Russia and in the rest of the world" on cellular service, said Grigory Bakunov, an expert on Russian technology.

Following the recent exit of French automaker Renault, Russia is moving to restart production of the Moskvich — a Soviet-era make that went bankrupt two decades ago after failing to achieve foreign quality standards. Its resurrection, potentially with Chinese assistance, could either jump-start the production of domestic alternatives or see a new generation of clunkers clogging Russian roads.

Supply disruptions, however, have hit not only assembly lines that rely on advanced technology but also those using imported materials. Sanctions "on the Russian Federation have practically broken all the logistics in our country," Russian Transport Minister Vitaly Savelyev, conceded to journalists last weekend during a visit to Russia's Astrakhan region.

Under the hood of the Russian economy

The ruble has rebounded since its initial swoon after sanctions were imposed in the winter, and Russian government coffers are flush from a bonanza of oil revenue. European countries have taken halting steps toward their pledge to curb reliance on Russia's oil and gas, by far its largest exports, even as Moscow boosts sales to Asia.

JPMorgan this month projected that the recession triggered by sanctions would be less sharp, if more drawn out, than had been predicted earlier. Some economic indicators, including electricity consumption, point to better-than-expected business activity.

But look under the Russian hood and a grimmer picture comes into focus.

Russia was never a standard-bearer for globalization. In a globalization ranking published last year by the KOF Swiss Economic Institute, Russia ranks 51st — behind Mauritius, Jordan and Ukraine. Following an initial wave of Western sanctions in 2014, after Moscow annexed Ukraine's Crimea region, Russia turned inward, seeking to rely even more on domestic production.

But that shift never really worked. Russia found some success in food production, reducing reliance on imports and satisfying more of its domestic demand. But a 2021 report from the Russian Central Bank found that 65 percent of domestic companies still required imports for manufacturing.

Sanctions have now shut the door on a wide range of those crucial inputs. Though many have not been explicitly banned, their availability has vanished as foreign companies avoid the taint of doing business in Russia. For Russians, the prospect of diminished consumer choice and poorer quality harks back to a tragicomic era famously lampooned in a 1980s Wendy's commercial that depicted a Soviet fashion show in which Russian "daywear," "evening wear" and "swimwear" were all the same dull gray smock.

"Especially for anything more sophisticated, they will have to rely on what they can produce, and they will use designs or templates that are maybe 10 or 20 years old," said Tomas Malmlöf, a senior scientist at the Swedish Defense Research Agency. "The technological gap [with the West] will become larger, and they will not be able to breach it."

Those industries requiring microchips and other difficult-to-acquire advanced technology are being hit the hardest. "Automobiles, tanks, hygiene products, even print paper. This is where you need microchips, but also specialized chemicals and other imports that Russia is having problems getting," said Anders Aslund, an economist who has long studied Russia.

In the aviation sector, even Russian-manufactured planes rely on critical Western-made components. Several Russian airlines operating Russia's Sukhoi Superjet 100s have informed the government that they

can no longer ensure proper maintenance of its French-Russian SaM146 engine. If a solution is not found quickly, the airlines have warned, most of their Russian-made fleets could be grounded by fall, the Russian business daily publication RBC reported.

Even the most optimistic analysts say it could take at least a couple of years for Russia to develop assembly lines for commercial planes made almost exclusively with local components. Other analysts project it could take far longer, if it happens at all.

“We don’t think on the commercial front it is particularly viable for them to, in the near or medium term, maintain or start the manufacture of competitive domestic civil aviation aircraft,” said a senior Biden administration official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal assessments.

Before the invasion, most of Russia’s commercial fleet was leased from foreign companies: planes that Moscow seized in the aftermath of sanctions. Most of the planes had been registered in Bermuda and Ireland, where local inspectors certified their airworthiness. European aviation authorities have expressed alarm that Russian airlines have limited engineering and technical support to maintain the planes and that Russian inspectors lack necessary expertise.

Some Russians are particularly concerned that Rosaviatsiya, Russia’s aviation regulator, has loosened rules on who can conduct aircraft maintenance now that Western companies are no longer able or willing to do it. The task will fall to local firms, whose capacity and training have been questioned by critics. Russia is beginning to issue its own certificates of airworthiness for planes, which had been largely determined by foreign inspectors.

“Russia’s safety record was not stellar before, maybe at the level of Indonesia,” said aviation analyst Volodymyr Bilotkach. “But now, flying a Russian carrier is turning into a game of Russian roulette.”

Shortages of American alcohol and Italian fabric

In Moscow, business remains brisk at restaurants that feared just months ago that sanctions would force them to close. It is a sign, at least in the capital, that money from oil exports, and government steps to lower interest rates and raise wages and pensions have blunted the impact. Several establishments have sought to adapt by sticking to locally sourced foods. A bigger problem, though, is booze.

Russian distributors estimated that the United States exported about 7 million liters of whisky, rum, gin, and bourbon to Russia each year. To make up the shortfall, they are turning to smaller, lesser-known brands.

“Even if all other cities in Russia are suffering and barely have bread to eat tomorrow, there will still be money in Moscow,” said a cocktail bar owner in Moscow, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized by his investors to discuss business matters. “Plus, people seem to have grown used to the situation ... My main problem right now is [the lack of] American alcohol.”

Where good are still available, they are often more expensive — which is helping fuel inflation at higher rates than in the West — or of poorer quality.

“Look, I’ll be honest, if we need to sew a high-quality garment, we normally would go and buy a nice Italian fabric,” said the owner of a textile factory in the Moscow region, who spoke on the condition of anonymity out of fear of government reprisals. The company, she said, was still working with existing inventory of high-end fabric but was now weighing whether to switch to making cheaper clothing, or just shut down after stocks run out. “The quality of what’s available in Russia is just not on par,” she said.

Natalia, the owner of a Moscow logistics firm who declined to give her last name because she fears the government, described how sanctions were spurring price hikes. The ban on E.U. trucks entering Russia or Belarus means that goods traveling by land must now be offloaded at the border, then unloaded to new trucks that can travel into and across Russia. Meanwhile, flight bans had shut down a legion of air routes.

“What happens? What do you think happens? The price goes up and up and up,” she said.

Where possible, Russian manufacturers have tried to make up shortfalls by turning to Turkey and markets in Asia. But pandemic-related supply chain disruptions have hampered those efforts.

In addition, many Russian assembly lines were designed using European or other Western technologies or materials in mind. “The assembly lines are sometimes dependent on French conveyor belts or bearings from the United States and Germany,” Natalia said. “That’s not as easy to change as you think.”

Moreover, she said, essential parts for even run-of-the-mill businesses, including furniture and coffin makers, have also been affected because their foreign suppliers are reluctant or unwilling to provide export declarations certifying that those parts would not be used for military purposes.

In the best cases, that means delays; what used to ship in two weeks now takes six weeks, she said. But some parts, such as industrial fan propellers and rubber seals used by Russian furniture makers as well as Russian defense industries — were being indefinitely held up.

“Production won’t stop for shoes, clothing, sausages, those kinds of things, but we will go back to what Russia was like in the ’60s, ’70s, ’80s, where the quality is worse and the price is higher, when you can actually get the product,” she said.

“I remember how, if you wanted a kitchen, you would have to go to the shop and get a number and stay in a queue,” she continued. “But not for hours or days. You’d sometimes wait half a year for a kitchen. I’m afraid those days are coming back.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 CDC monkeypox travel advisory
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/travel/2022/05/25/cdc-monkeypox-travel-advisory/
GIST	<p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has issued a monkeypox alert to travelers after cases were reported in North America, Europe and Australia. The Level 2 alert urged people traveling to “Practice Enhanced Precautions,” though the agency said the risk is low for the general public.</p> <p>Confirmed cases of the rare disease have been found in countries including the United States, Canada, Australia, England, France, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and Israel.</p> <p>“None of these people reported having recently been in central or west African countries where monkeypox usually occurs, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Nigeria, among others,” the CDC alert says.</p> <p>The CDC warned travelers to avoid close contact with sick people and wild animals such as small mammals and primates (living or dead). Travelers are also discouraged from preparing or eating wild game meat, and the agency said travelers should refrain from using products — such as creams, powders and lotions — made from African wild animals. The warning says to avoid contact with materials used by sick people or animals.</p> <p>Monkeypox causes symptoms including headache, muscle aches and fever, along with lesions on the body, with illness lasting between two and four weeks, according to the agency. Infections typically arise through contact with the skin lesions or bodily fluids of people or animals that have been infected. Those include respiratory droplets. People can also get infected via contact with contaminated materials. The illness has been fatal in as many as 1 in 10 people in Africa.</p> <p>The CDC advised seeking medical care if you have a new rash on your skin without explanation, keeping away from others, and, if you think you could be infected, staying off public transportation until you have been cleared.</p>

	<p>An infection in Massachusetts was the first identified this year in the United States. Health authorities have shared concerns about the increase in cases. However, they have also said the virus is significantly less transmissible than the coronavirus.</p> <p>President Biden said Monday he did not expect a quarantine would be needed to curb the spread of monkeypox in this country. “I just don’t think it rises to the level of the kind of concern that existed with covid-19, and the smallpox vaccine works for it,” he said at a news conference.</p> <p>Studies indicate the smallpox vaccine is, at minimum, 85 percent effective against monkeypox, per the CDC.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/25 Big-time Spokane events return
SOURCE	https://crosscut.com/news/2022/05/big-time-spokane-events-return-after-pandemic-pause
GIST	<p>When Eli Geranios talked about his hometown during an introductory presentation for his accounting job in Seattle, it was mostly about basketball.</p> <p>Spokane, after all, is home to Gonzaga University and its prestigious basketball program.</p> <p>But he also made sure to talk about Hoopfest, the three-on-three basketball tournament that has attracted thousands of people for a summer weekend in the Lilac City. Geranios started playing in the tournament as a child and continued right up to college. His Spokane home was “a hostel” for his visiting cousins who played in the tournament.</p> <p>“That’s how people are going to recognize” Spokane, which is also the birthplace of Father’s Day, said Geranios, 26.</p> <p>For several decades, Hoopfest and Bloomsday, a 12-kilometer — or 7.46 mile — road race, have together drawn tens of thousands of participants, community volunteers and spectators. They’re homegrown events that have brought people from across the state — and even the U.S. — to one of the largest cities in the Inland Northwest.</p> <p>“Having Hoopfest, having Bloomsday ... and all sorts of major events draw people in,” said Kate Hudson, public relations manager of Visit Spokane. “It definitely helps market the region and build awareness.”</p> <p>But with the COVID-19 pandemic putting a halt to gatherings big and small, the streets of downtown Spokane have been quiet for the past two years. Bloomsday went to a virtual race format for 2020 and 2021. Hoopfest was canceled both years.</p> <p>The hiatus of both events meant lost revenue for event organizers, dwindling tourism activity and lost opportunities for in-person community engagement.</p> <p>Now as many people seek to return to some form of “normal,” Hoopfest, Bloomsday and other large-scale events are returning to Spokane. Bloomsday was held on May 1, the first in-person race in three years and Hoopfest will follow in June.</p> <p>While event organizers want to recover the losses from a prolonged hiatus, most are focused on making the events happen and bringing back the community interactions many had lost during the pandemic.</p> <p>“If we’re able to do this and put on a successful race and community event, it just means the events that follow in Spokane and the region have a good foundation to build from,” said Jon Neill, Bloomsday race director.</p>

With the race promotion for Bloomsday happening when the infectious omicron variant was raging, addressing public health and accommodating participants hesitant about returning to large-scale events were top of mind.

“When it comes to hosting a road race during the pandemic, post-pandemic, we’re going to do everything in our power to make sure we’re safe, and we’re not doing anything that runs counter to personal health and safety,” Neill said.

The losses

Bloomsday attracted just under 40,000 participants in 2019, the last time the event was held pre-pandemic. Hoopfest, which celebrated its 30th anniversary, attracted about 24,000 players representing 6,000 teams that same year.

According to figures from Visit Spokane, a nonprofit tourism marketing organization, Bloomsday generated \$12 million in economic activity pre-pandemic — hotel stays, shopping, restaurants and attraction fees — and Hoopfest brought in \$50 million.

According to Visit Spokane, Spokane County's tourism activity dropped from \$1.3 billion in 2019 to just \$580 million in 2020.

Federal tax forms from the nonprofits holding the two events also indicate a significant drop in event revenue. Total revenue for Spokane Hoopfest Association, which organizes the event, decreased from \$2.75 million for the 2019 fiscal year ending in September 2019 to just over \$1.28 million for the same period in 2020. Revenue did bounce back to nearly \$1.6 million in 2021, when Hoopfest was canceled just weeks before it was to start because of rising cases associated with the delta variant.

Riley Stockton, executive director of the Spokane Hoopfest Association, said the organizers offered refunds, but many participants opted to roll over entries to 2022. Sponsors did the same. The organization also received federal and state stimulus dollars.

And that money was needed: Since the cancellation of the 2021 event came just weeks before the scheduled event, the organization still had to pay 70% of the event expenses for 2021.

“We had sponsors that have been absolutely incredible supporting us, staying with us and making sure those lights stay on,” he said. “We truly couldn’t do it without them.”

Maintaining community

According to federal nonprofit forms, Bloomsday also saw a drop in revenue — from \$1.44 million for the 2019 fiscal year ending in July to \$764,999 in 2020.

The organization has brought in money by holding a virtual race, where people run their own course and submit times online afterward, for the past two years.

The virtual race enabled the Bloomsday organization to stay connected with participants during the pandemic, Neill said. More than 20,000 runners signed up for the virtual race in both 2020 and 2021. Race organizers emulated the in-person race experience as much as possible, right down to mailing out finisher shirts.

“Not being able to host a road race as we have done for the previous 43 years, it was wonderful to see that type of encouragement, participation and just excitement [for doing] our race remotely,” Neill said.

Roger Aldrich is a “Perennial,” a group of racers who have run every Bloomsday race.

Don Kardong, a 1976 Olympic marathoner and Spokane resident, launched the first Lilac Bloomsday Run in 1977. At the time, Aldrich worked as a civil service instructor with the Air Force and enjoyed

running races on the weekends. When he heard about a new race happening in downtown Spokane, he signed up.

And Aldrich, now 74, has run every year since.

“There are (nearly) 80 of us that have done it all together. I’m one of the younger ones — there are people in their high-80s and a couple over 90. It just grows on you,” he said.

Many of his memories involve being among the Bloomsday running community, whether it’s running fast enough to keep the elite runners within sight, running the race with his children and grandchildren or hearing spectators cheering him on as he climbs the famed Doomsday Hill.

Aldrich said he was skeptical of the virtual run format. But after doing the race virtually for the past two years, he felt the same sense of accomplishment.

“The culture is such [that] the people won’t let it die out,” he said.

Man attempts to shoot as defender and other players watch during a game in downtown Spokane
A game at Spokane Hoopfest in 2019. (Courtesy of Spokane Hoopfest)

A game at Spokane Hoopfest in 2019. (Courtesy of Spokane Hoopfest)

A basketball town

In 2019, the Spokane Hoopfest Association launched its Hooptown USA initiative to promote the assets, such as Hoopfest and the Gonzaga University basketball program, that have made the greater Spokane area a great basketball town.

The initiative also includes community efforts to cultivate basketball play around the city year-round, such as resurfacing and beautifying the city’s basketball courts. That effort continued during the pandemic, thanks partly to rolled over team fees and sponsorships from years when the event was canceled, said Stockton, the executive director of the Spokane Hoopfest Association.

Stockton is new to the executive director position — he came to it in January — but his connections to Spokane’s basketball culture run deep.

Riley Stockton’s uncle is John Stockton, the Spokane native who played for Gonzaga University and the Utah Jazz in the National Basketball Association. Riley Stockton played in Hoopfest since he was 6, participating through high school. He returned to Spokane after playing basketball for Seattle Pacific University in Seattle, professional basketball for CD Estela in Spain and working for Special Olympics Washington in Seattle.

So he takes seriously overseeing Hoopfest — and the Hooptown USA brand — through its post-pandemic phase.

“I take a lot of pride in not only this organization. I take a lot of pride in Spokane,” he said.

And Stockton can lean on an established track record of success for large-scale community events in this city.

Researchers at Washington State University looked at Spokane’s community events in a recent case study on event safety.

When research started in early 2020, event safety focused on responding to tragic events, such as firearm and gun violence. But the COVID-19 pandemic pushed the researchers to look at the public health aspect of personal safety, said Mark Beattie, one of the study’s co-authors. He is an assistant professor of hospitality and associate vice chancellor for academic affairs at WSU Everett.

The study, which featured interviews with a wide variety of people involved in event planning and the hospitality industry, concluded that Spokane's success reflected a collaborative and community-based support system. The study noted regular monthly meetings between event organizers and city officials, including police, representatives of the city's Parks and Recreation Department and the Spokane mayor's office.

Such gatherings enabled all involved in community events to build trust and communication that allow everyone to be on the same page regarding city and state regulations, such as those tied to the COVID-19 pandemic, and to develop a plan to respond to any situation that comes up.

"It does come down to the people that are involved," Beattie said. "At the end of the day, it's about relationships."

Moving forward

After two years of virtual races, more than 20,000 runners were at the Bloomsday starting line on May 1.

Among those running was Hudson of the Visit Spokane organization.

As a tourism marketing professional, Hudson was thrilled to see people staying at local hotels and dining in local restaurants again.

As a runner, she enjoyed taking in the sounds and sights of the Bloomsday experience — the bands playing along the route, volunteers handing out water and giving finishers T-shirts at the finish line downtown.

"It felt great, it felt energized, it felt we were finally back on track," she said.

The 2022 figures were below the nearly 40,000 runners who started the race three years ago and less than the 60,000 runners who showed up to Bloomsday at its participant peak in the 1990s.

The lower turnout didn't surprise Neill, the Bloomsday race director.

"Knowing this is our first year back, there is some hesitancy to jump right into a big community event with that many people in the downtown core and along the course," he said. "We know we'll be building back to where we were."

Bloomsday also offered a virtual race option this year, attracting more than 5,000 runners. The popularity of the virtual run — and the ongoing concerns regarding COVID — made it an easy choice for organizers to offer it this year.

"I think it's wonderful that people could do it with their comfort level and likewise adapt to their own concerns about health and their own personal safety," Neill said.

Once skeptical of the virtual race, Aldrich decided to take that option to keep his Bloomsday streak going for another year.

Although he was vaccinated, Aldrich said he still felt he was at risk because of his age and his health. He didn't want to risk infecting himself or the rest of his family.

"I don't need to stand down there on Bloomsday morning with 25,000 to 30,000 shoulder to shoulder with no mask on," he said.

But he was glad for those who decided to run on race day — he ran the course beforehand — and looks forward to joining them in the years to come. He is especially looking forward to 2026, when the race will reach its 50th year.

“I’ll be 78 at that point,” he said. “Hopefully, I’ll still feel good enough and be in good enough shape to do it, no matter how fast.”

Another participant in the virtual run was Beattie of Washington State University. He believes virtual runs and other public health protocols will remain a part of events for some time. It’s a way for event organizers to prevent potential issues and enables the event to be more inclusive and welcoming.

“It’s just about providing a welcoming environment for the space you’re in,” he said.

After seeing Bloomsday’s successful return, Stockton, the Hoopfest executive director, is feeling good about the event next month.

He also expects lower participant numbers — he estimated 60% to 75% of pre-pandemic numbers — but like the Bloomsday organizers, he will be happy to see the event happen, especially after the last-minute cancellation last year.

“However many teams we have, whatever the size of the event, it’s going to be a huge success,” he said. “Some of the people on staff have been planning this one Hoopfest for three years.”

Geranios, the former Spokane resident who now lives in Seattle, will be traveling to Spokane to compete. After coming to Hoopfest as a spectator in recent years, he’ll be on a team with his older brother and two other friends.

For years, Geranios and his brother have told those two friends about Hoopfest and are excited to share the experience with them.

While Geranios hasn’t played much basketball lately, he knows he’ll get right into the spirit when he’s dribbling the ball on the court in downtown Spokane.

“The second the whistle blows, it’s ‘give everything you have’ because you don’t want to lose, and we’re all competitive people at heart,” he said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 Debate over local SRO reignited
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/debate-over-local-school-resource-officers-reignited/XL6BIT6WN5C35I7OTGDS7HFUHA/
GIST	<p>The mass shooting at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, has reignited discussions about whether or not to enlist on-campus officers.</p> <p>In 2020, the Tacoma, Seattle, and Edmonds Public School Districts each voted to end on-campus partnerships with law enforcement. The decision came following protests of police brutality. However, the Puyallup School District decided to keep their Student Resource Officers, or SROs, in place.</p> <p>Deputy Carly Cappetto serves school districts in both Puyallup and Bethel as an SRO. She says many students spoke with her about the deadly shooting in Texas, worried that something like that could happen in their schools.</p> <p>“I wake up every morning hoping that nothing like this would ever happen,” says Cappetto. “However, the reality of it is they do happen and we have to be prepared.”</p> <p>She believes her work as an SRO is two-fold; preventing crime in the classroom and being able to respond quickly if something happens. She also believes it’s a position more schools should invest in.</p>

“It’s important for the students to see us in the schools, and they do feel safer,” says Cappetto. “We investigate bullying situations, harassment situations, assaults, we deal with drugs and weapons in schools. There’s a lot that we deal with.”

Two years after the dismissal of SROs, parents are still torn.

Daniel Wharton, a dad, takes issue with the idea of armed officers in all schools. He believes it could be triggering for some students.

“I think it would be more frightening for them,” says Wharton. “Just having that armed presence.”

Mariah Arnold, a mom, disagrees.

“It would 100% make me feel safer,” says Arnold. “Because kids don’t know what to do. And teachers don’t know what to do.”

Cappetto says officers have the advantage of active shooter training, a deadly scenario that more and more schools are facing.

“Unfortunately, it takes a situation like Texas for people to recognize having that right in their school,” says Cappetto. “I feel that if we could have more school resource officers available to these students, we would have a more ideal situation. I know that’s not ideal in every situation. [But] It’s extremely important to have officers in the school to be that first responder.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 India jails Kashmiri leader to life in prison
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/indian-court-sentences-kashmiri-leader-to-life-in-prison/
GIST	<p>EW DELHI (AP) — An Indian court sentenced a Kashmiri separatist leader to life in prison on Wednesday after declaring him guilty of terrorism and sedition, triggering a clash between protesters and police and a partial shutdown of businesses in the Indian-controlled portion of Kashmir.</p> <p>Mohammed Yasin Malik, 56, led the banned Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, one of the first armed rebel groups in the Indian-held area, but later shifted to peaceful means in seeking the end of Indian rule.</p> <p>Muslim-majority Kashmir has been divided between India and Pakistan since British colonialists granted it independence in 1947. Both countries claim the region in its entirety and have fought two wars over its control.</p> <p>Malik was arrested in 2019 and was convicted last week on charges of committing terrorist acts, illegally raising funds, belonging to a terrorist organization, and criminal conspiracy and sedition.</p> <p>Before Wednesday’s sentencing, dozens of Kashmiris gathered at Malik’s home in Srinagar, the largest city in Indian-controlled Kashmir. Some marched through the streets, chanting “We want freedom” and “Go back India.” Government forces fired tear gas at the marchers, who threw stones. No injuries were immediately reported.</p> <p>Shops and businesses closed in the main centers of Srinagar.</p> <p>Prosecutors said the judge rejected their request for a death sentence.</p> <p>The government banned Malik’s organization in 2019, accusing it of funding terrorism and blaming it for the deaths of minority Hindus in the Himalayan region.</p> <p>Malik protested the charges during the trial and said he was a freedom fighter.</p>

“The terrorism-related charges leveled against me are concocted, fabricated and politically motivated,” he said.

“If seeking azadi (freedom) is a crime, then I am ready to accept this crime and its consequences,” he told the judge.

Pakistan Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif condemned Malik’s sentencing, and its Foreign Ministry said it summoned India’s top diplomat in Islamabad.

“Today is a black day for Indian democracy & its justice system,” Sharif tweeted. “India can imprison Yasin Malik physically but it can never imprison idea of freedom he symbolizes. Life imprisonment for valiant freedom fighter will provide fresh impetus to Kashmiris’ right to self-determination.”

In the late 1980s, Malik joined a group of young people who traveled to Pakistani-controlled Kashmir for arms training, seeking independence for all of Kashmir from India and Pakistan.

By 1989, Indian-controlled Kashmir was in the throes of a full-blown rebellion, with Malik and his comrades conducting attacks against the Indian security establishment and pro-India Kashmiri politicians.

India responded with a massive militarization of Kashmir, saying it was fighting a Pakistan-sponsored proxy war. It unleashed a brutal counterinsurgency campaign, and soldiers were given broad impunity and allowed to shoot suspects on sight or detain them indefinitely.

Malik was arrested during a raid by Indian troops in 1990 and was released in 1994. He took over control of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, shifting away from armed rebellion and seeking the end of Indian rule over the territory through peaceful political means.

In 2003, Malik and his associates began collecting signatures of Kashmiris seeking the right to self-determination. They traveled for two years to hundreds of villages and towns, gathering over 1.5 million signatures.

He helped lead an anti-India uprising in 2008 with large-scale protests that marked a shift from armed struggle to non-violent resistance. He continued to lead large public gatherings in subsequent years seeking an end of Indian rule.

Malik held several unsuccessful rounds of talks with the Indian government, including with two prime ministers. He is married to a Pakistani artist, Mushaal Hussein, and they have a 10-year-old daughter.

Most Muslim Kashmiris support the rebel goal of uniting the territory, either under Pakistani rule or as an independent country. Tens of thousands of civilians, rebels and government forces have been killed in the conflict since 1989.

The All Parties Hurriyat Conference, a coalition of anti-Indian Kashmiri political groups, said Malik was “being punished for his political beliefs” and was “convicted in invented cases under draconian laws.”

The group urged the Indian government to release all Kashmiri political prisoners and resolve the Kashmir conflict through dialogue.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 DEA collects 9,000lbs WA ‘drug take back’
SOURCE	https://www.justice.gov/usao-edwa/pr/nearly-24000-pounds-unused-medications-collected-pacific-northwest-during-dea-drug-take
GIST	Spokane – United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Washington Vanessa Waldref and DEA Acting Special Agent in Charge Jacob D. Galvan announced the collection of thousands of pounds of

unused medications in the Pacific Northwest. In all, close to 24,000 pounds of drugs were collected in the Northwest United States. Of these, over 9,000 pounds were collected at 117 sites in Washington.

On April 30, 2022, U.S. Attorney Waldref, Spokane Police Chief Craig Meidl, Spokane Fire Chief Brian Schaeffer, DEA Assistant Special Agent in Charge Mark Haigh, and representatives from their respective offices joined together at the Northtown Mall and other sites in Spokane, where 18 large boxes, weighing hundreds of pounds, of unused medicines were collected.

“Removing unused prescription drugs from our homes is one way to keep our families safe and build stronger communities,” U.S. Attorney Waldref stated. “We are honored to partner with the DEA, Spokane Police, the Spokane County Sheriff’s Office, and the Spokane Fire Department for this important event. We have all witnessed the ravaging effects of the opioid epidemic in our region, and we are encouraged by the proactive efforts members of our communities are taking to prevent prescription drug misuse and addiction.”

“The DEA Drug Take Back is another important way in which we are working to keep our communities in the Pacific Northwest safe,” said Acting Special Agent in Charge Jacob D. Galvan, DEA Seattle Field Division. “By collecting nearly 24,000 pounds of unused medications, we protected our vulnerable citizens from misuse and overdose.”

Chief Meidl stated, “We appreciate that community members took advantage of the opportunity to safely dispose of dangerous drugs. This reinforces that our community is aware of the severity of drug addiction and drug-related deaths and is willing to take steps to help keep everyone safe. The Spokane Police Department is committed to furthering the drug battle on another front by continuing to hold those responsible for the manufacture and distribution of illegal drugs accountable, and working with our partners to ensure a safer community.”

Nationwide, the DEA and its partners collected more than 720,000 pounds of unneeded medications at 5,144 collection sites. Since 2010, more than 16 million pounds of unneeded prescription medications have been collected through Drug Take Back events.

In addition to DEA’s National Prescription Drug Take Back Day, the FDA provides information on how to safely and properly dispose of prescription drugs every day. To find out where year-round disposal sites are located, go to <https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/where-and-how-dispose-unused-medicines>.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Anarchists join Ukraine's war effort
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/26/putin-anarchists-join-ukraine-war-effort
GIST	<p>In an unnamed basement bar in central Kyiv, Ukrainian anarchists have created a headquarters where they gather supplies to send to their peers on the frontlines and welcome anarchists from abroad who have come to fight.</p> <p>It is unusual to see anarchists supporting state structures, but they say taking action against Russia is necessary for their survival. “We are fighting to protect the more or less free society that exists in Ukraine,” said an activist, Dmytro. “Without which there would be no space for activism or underground movements.”</p> <p>He added: “Putin’s terror is happening [in Ukraine] and it is indiscriminate. It is happening against every part of the population, but especially against the Russian-speaking parts of the population that Putin supposedly came here to liberate,” referring to the fact that the war has been heaviest in eastern and southern Ukraine.</p> <p>“His regime is an ultraconservative, rightwing dictatorship that represses anarchists in Russia, the free press, LGBT networks. It scares even the most banal, grassroots initiatives, like animal rights activists. We</p>

see the conflict between Ukraine and Russia as a conflict between a more or less democratic state and a totalitarian one.”

The activist left is relatively small in Ukraine, where the memory of Soviet communism lingers, and its anarchist component is even smaller. But from 1917-21 Ukraine was home to one of the world’s most famous anarchist movements, which sprung out of the power vacuum created by the fall of Tsarist Russia.

Led by the anarchist Nestor Makhno, the movement argued for the rights of Ukraine’s peasantry and quickly grew in popularity under the slogans “Death to those who stand in the way of free working people” and “Power breeds parasites, long live anarchy!”

At the height of the movement, self-governing communes existed across most of southern and eastern Ukraine under the protection of Makhno’s army. His base was in Huliaipole, a town in Ukraine’s Zaporizhzhia region, which has been frequently fought over since February. The Bolsheviks defeated Makhno’s army and he died in exile in Paris.

Those at the Kyiv anarchists’ headquarters admit that these are no longer “Makhno times”. Today, the anarchist movement in Ukraine is small and a battalion acting independently would collapse on a modern-day battlefield, they say.

About 100 anarchists have signed up to fight in Ukraine’s army and territorial defence forces, according to Serhiy Movchan, the group’s spokesperson. In addition, about 20 foreign anarchists have signed up, including a Russian who fled his country three years ago. Others have come to Ukraine to work as volunteer paramedics.

“We have a strict screening process,” said Dmytro, who was eager to stress that the foreign volunteers differ from some of the others who have arrived in the country since February. “We don’t want people who just come here to kill; we want them to understand what they are fighting for.”

Before the 24 February invasion, the anarchists – small in number – would join forces with wider leftwing activist networks. But attracting supporters faced obstacles due to the country’s experience of the Soviet era.

In the name of socialism, mass murders were carried out, a man-made famine was created, and swathes of culture and history, including the Ukrainian language, were repressed. A controversial set of de-Communisation laws were passed in 2015 to deal with this legacy, but many on the left feel the wider population began to associate everything on the left with the Soviet Union.

Then, under Putin’s Russia Kremlin spin doctors and their allies co-opted leftist rhetoric to create pro-Russian political parties across the former Soviet Union, including Ukraine. These parties were used to appeal to those voters who harboured nostalgia for communist times.

Leaked emails in 2016 revealed how the Kharkiv regional leader of the Communist party of Ukraine, banned the previous year for promoting separatism, had received emails from the office of the former Kremlin spin doctor Vladislav Surkov on how to foment separatism and campaign for federalisation. (Since 2014 the Kremlin has been pushing for federalisation in Ukraine as Russia’s way of re-gaining leverage in national politics.)

Dmytro also pointed to the “leftwing” messaging used by the Kremlin when creating the self-declared people’s republics in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, the Russian-backed unrecognised states in eastern Ukraine. He said that the irony is that the entities have been headed by ultra-rightists such as Igor Girkin, who promoted Russian nationalism, carried out extrajudicial killings, and banned freedom of speech and association.

The recent full-scale invasion by Russia has brought another layer of mud for activists on Ukraine’s left, said Movchan.

	<p>“Putin has appropriated the word anti-fascist and he exploits it to justify his war,” said Movchan. “[Ukrainian] nationalists say if you’re anti-fascist, you’re pro-Russian, but that’s not the case.”</p> <p>Movchan said far-right nationalism has always failed to gain popular support in Ukraine, but moderate nationalism – which emphasises religion, language and the army – became mainstream after 2014.</p> <p>Many Ukrainian politicians assumed nationalist messaging in an ensuing competition to present themselves as Ukrainian patriots. This nationalism promotes conservative, non-progressive ideas and therefore presents a “big problem”, said Movchan.</p> <p>“I think both sides of the elite did a lot to create a situation whereby Ukrainians argue a lot about language and versions of history instead of how Kryvyi Rih Stal was privatised,” said Movchan, referring to Ukraine’s largest steelworks that was privatised in 2004 by oligarchs close to the then-president.</p> <p>Movchan said that this form of nationalism has given those in power a tool to ignore Ukraine’s social issues, but that people need to be clear that Ukraine’s internal problems are not to blame for the war. “The cause of the war is the Russian Federation,” said Movchan.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/25 Canada’s refugee, asylum seekers ‘road’
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/25/canada-refugee-asylum-seekers-roxham-road
GIST	<p>Mohammed Al-Hashemi had been in the United States for two months when his phone rang. There was no caller ID. “I can take you straight to Canada,” said the man, before warning: “It may cost you a lot of money.”</p> <p>“I told him, ‘OK.’ I was ready to go, ready to move to the next step,” said Al-Hashemi, who had been a lawyer in Yemen before he was forced to flee.</p> <p>He was driven the next day to Roxham Road, which runs between Quebec and Plattsburgh, New York. After walking across the border, Al-Hashemi made his way to Montreal, where he stayed at a refugee shelter until his asylum claim was accepted.</p> <p>Since 2017, more than 60,000 asylum seekers have entered Canada through such irregular routes from the US, due to what some have called a “loophole” in a treaty between the two countries. The Safe Third Country Agreement, which has been in effect since 2004, stipulates that asylum seekers in either country must seek refugee protection in whichever country they first arrive and will be turned away from ports of entry to the other nation.</p> <p>But this agreement doesn’t apply to irregular crossings. And along the 5,525-mile border, Roxham Road is by far the most popular irregular crossing point. In the first three months of 2022, Royal Canadian Mounted Police intercepted more than 7,000 asylum seekers crossing into Quebec, primarily at Roxham Road.</p> <p>This influx is causing growing friction between provincial and federal authorities, prompting Quebec’s premier, François Legault, this month to ask Canada’s government to shut down Roxham Road, arguing that the province doesn’t have the funds or housing to handle the number of asylum seekers seen in recent months.</p> <p>Refugee advocates disagree with those claims. “The refugee organizations in Montreal have said very clearly that they do have capacity,” said Wendy Ayotte, founder of the Quebec-based group Bridges Not Borders, who argued that without the reliable route of Roxham Road, asylum seekers would resort to more dangerous options. “A definitive closure will be a major driver for smuggling,” said Ayotte.</p>

Although it is not an official port of entry, the crossing at Roxham Road is overseen by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and adheres to a clearly established system.

Day and night, taxis drop off asylum seekers. Some have just arrived in the United States on a visitor visa, others have been living there for years. Cab drivers yell out “French!” or “English!” to police waiting on the Quebec side. As people approach the border, they are arrested, read their rights and taken to shelters in Montreal.

Closing Roxham Road would exacerbate smuggling that already occurs along the border, said Craig Damian Smith, a senior research associate at Toronto Metropolitan University. He added that most asylum seekers using smugglers have already had an asylum claim rejected in the US – or are undocumented.

Ali, who requested his real name not be used, is a small business owner who fled from Yemen to escape the lawlessness and violence of the country’s brutal civil war. For the past seven years, he has lived in Buffalo, New York, waiting for the resolution of his asylum claim, but his patience is running out. “If nothing is new for me in a couple of months, I’m going to try to go [to Canada],” he said.

Smugglers in Buffalo offer transportation to Roxham Road for \$1,000-\$2,000 per person. To avoid raising police suspicion, they pose as Uber or Lyft drivers by placing company stickers on their windshields. Ali initially contemplated hiring a smuggler before realizing he could just take a bus to Plattsburgh.

The existence of smugglers is common knowledge among Roxham Road’s taxi drivers working Plattsburgh’s bus stop. Cab drivers also meet with “runners”, who charge refugees large sums to be driven to Plattsburgh from all over the country, said local cab driver Wayne, who asked that his full name not be used.

While most irregular crossings occur at Roxham Road, some asylum seekers take more dangerous routes. Seidu Mohammed feared persecution in his native Ghana for being bisexual., and in December 2016, he traveled to Manitoba on a journey that almost cost him his life.

Mohammed and a companion found a driver in Minnesota willing to take them to the border for \$200 each. After crossing into Manitoba, they walked for hours in the snow before flagging down a truck. Both men lost their fingers to frostbite.

Mohammed’s asylum claim was accepted, and he has since founded a soccer program for underprivileged families and new refugees in Canada.

At the time of his crossing, he was unaware that Roxham Road existed. “If I’d known, I would’ve gone there instead.”

While Quebec is concerned with the closure of Roxham Road, the legal framework of migration may soon be changing. Justin Trudeau has repeatedly said that Canada is negotiating a new version of the Safe Third Country Agreement with the United States. La Presse reported in December that these negotiations will close the “loophole” and halt irregular migration across the border.

How and when any amendments will take shape remains unclear. However, like the closure of Roxham Road, it’s speculated that an expanded agreement would affect smuggling.

“With an expansion of that sort, the smuggling would be even more intense and dangerous and costly,” said Janet Dench, executive director of the Canadian Council for Refugees.

Neela Hassan, 29, left Afghanistan in 2019, after her research on female education led to threats from the Taliban. Hassan took immigration classes, spoke with lawyers, and memorized her rights as an asylum seeker. Then, she flew to Plattsburgh and took a cab up to Roxham Road.

	<p>If the crossing hadn't been accepting asylum seekers at the time, Hassan believes she would have resorted to using a smuggler.</p> <p>"It's hard to understand why someone would take a dangerous step like that. But sometimes you're in a very desperate situation where you're like, do it or die," said Hassan.</p> <p>"You take the risk because your life is at risk."</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/26 Iran: industrial accident near military site
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/26/iran-military-complex-parchin-nuclear-watchdog
GIST	<p>One person has been killed in an "industrial accident" near an Iranian military complex that has previously come under scrutiny from the UN nuclear watchdog, according to state media reports.</p> <p>"An industrial accident took place [on Wednesday evening] in one of the factories in the Parchin area, leading to the death of one person and injuries to another," Iran's official IRNA news agency said. It gave no details of the cause of the accident.</p> <p>The Parchin complex, south-east of Tehran, is alleged to have previously hosted testing of conventional explosives that could be used to detonate a nuclear warhead, something Iran has repeatedly denied.</p> <p>The site came under renewed scrutiny by the International Atomic Energy Agency in 2015 when Tehran reached a landmark deal under which it agreed to curb its nuclear activities under UN supervision in return for the lifting of international sanctions.</p> <p>Iran had previously denied the IAEA access to Parchin, saying it was a military site unrelated to any nuclear activities, but the agency's then chief, the late Yukiya Amano, paid a visit.</p> <p>In June 2020, a gas tank explosion in a "public area" near the complex shook the capital, 20 miles (30km) away but caused no casualties, the defence ministry said at the time.</p> <p>Iran's nuclear programme has been the target of a campaign of sabotage, cyber-attacks and the murder of scientists, which it blames on Israel.</p> <p>Israeli leaders have repeatedly refused to rule out military action to prevent Iran developing an atomic bomb.</p> <p>Iran has consistently denied any ambition to develop a nuclear weapon and says its activities are entirely peaceful.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/25 Iran used secret UN records; evade probes
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/iran-used-secret-u-n-records-to-evade-nuclear-probes-11653473247?mod=hp_lead_pos12
GIST	<p>Iran secured access to secret United Nations atomic agency reports almost two decades ago and circulated the documents among top officials who prepared cover stories and falsified a record to conceal suspected past work on nuclear weapons, according to Middle East intelligence officials and documents reviewed by The Wall Street Journal.</p> <p>The International Atomic Energy Agency documents and accompanying Persian-language Iranian records reveal some of the tactics Tehran used with the agency, which is tasked with monitoring compliance with nuclear nonproliferation treaties and the later 2015 nuclear deal.</p>

The U.S. and the IAEA have said for years that Iran has failed to answer questions about its past nuclear work in a cat-and-mouse game that continues to this day and [now complicates a revival of the nuclear deal](#), which lifted most international sanctions on Iran in exchange for limits on Iran's nuclear activities.

Middle East intelligence officials said the IAEA documents, marked confidential by the agency, and Iranian records were circulated between 2004 and 2006 among senior Iranian military, government and nuclear-program officials. The agency was investigating information that suggested Iran had worked on nuclear weapons.

Iran's acquisition of sensitive IAEA documents "represents a serious breach of IAEA internal security," said David Albright, president of the Institute for Science and International Security and a former U.N. weapons inspector. "Iran could design answers that admit to what the IAEA already knows, give away information that it will likely discover on its own, and at the same time better hide what the IAEA does not yet know that Iran wants to keep that way."

The IAEA, based in Vienna, declined to comment on the documents and didn't respond to questions about its handling of security.

Iranian officials didn't respond to requests for comment. Tehran has always denied working on nuclear weapons, which Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei prohibited in a decree in 2003.

The IAEA records accessed by Iran were among more than 100,000 documents and files seized by Israeli intelligence in January 2018 from a Tehran archive. Some documents include handwritten notes in Persian on IAEA documents and attachments with Iranian commentary. In several of the documents reviewed by the Journal, Iranian officials credited "intelligence methods" for obtaining the IAEA reports.

Israel has passed the nuclear archive over to the U.S. intelligence community, said people familiar with the matter, and given partial access to independent experts, [including from the Belfer Center](#) at Harvard University. The Belfer Center concluded in April 2019 that the archive showed Iran's nuclear work had advanced further than previously understood. The Journal reviewed documents from the archive that haven't been disclosed publicly.

One former IAEA official said the documents from the agency are authentic, and Mr. Albright, who had access to some of the nuclear archive and wrote a book on what it revealed about Iran's nuclear work, said the Persian-language documents reviewed by the Journal were consistent with what he had seen in other documents from the Iranian nuclear archive.

In one handwritten Persian note attached to an Iranian corporate record, a top Iranian official pressed Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, widely regarded as [the father of the country's nuclear weapons program](#), to come up with a "scenario" to explain to the IAEA why corporate-registration records had been changed for a civilian company that Iran claimed was working on an Iranian uranium mine.

According to a set of Iranian documents, the company, Kimiya Maadan, ceased to exist in Iranian corporate records in December 2001. One of the documents ordered Iranian officials to change Kimiya Maadan's liquidation date in corporate records to May 2003. According to Middle East intelligence officials, the change allowed Iran to tell the IAEA that the work on the uranium mine, before May 2003, was done by Kimiya Maadan for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, supporting Iran's assertion that the mine was civilian and separate from any military nuclear work.

Iran's Ministry of Defense built the uranium mine, called Gachin, to be able to produce material for a potential nuclear-weapons program, according to Middle Eastern intelligence officials and former IAEA officials.

In Persian, the top Iranian official wrote that the IAEA was bound to ask about the accuracy of the Iranian corporate records, telling Mr. Fakhrizadeh: "We must hurry."

In a separate instance, Iran's intelligence service circulated on May 19, 2004, an internal IAEA report to senior officials to prepare them for an inspection—scheduled for three days later—of a heavy-water production site southwest of Tehran near the town of Arak. Tehran had told the IAEA that it planned to build a heavy-water reactor for medical and research use there. Such reactors use heavy water as a coolant and produce plutonium as a waste product, which can be used in nuclear weapons.

The IAEA document included details of satellite information and open-source evidence of Iran's heavy-water work and a list of 18 questions the IAEA had prepared to ask Iran about its work.

Among the officials alerted about the IAEA records was Ali Shamkhani, then defense minister and now the country's national security chief. They were told that the IAEA had carried out an investigation of Iran's heavy-water work.

"Photographs of 27 pages of classified documents on the following topics are being sent," the letter said, referring to IAEA documents.

Another IAEA document obtained by Iran in 2004 was a 114-page set of reports describing uranium-conversion work that it said Iran was conducting. That process converts yellowcake into the feed material to produce enriched uranium.

The file included reports on nuclear material that Iran had received from China, internal IAEA reports of the agency's inspections of Iranian facilities and data from samples the agency had taken at Iran's conversion facilities. It was circulated to Mr. Fakhrizadeh and one of his main deputies, Fereydoon Abbasi, as well as Iran's defense minister and the head of its Atomic Energy Agency at the time.

Another Iranian document details steps Tehran took to keep a container with radiation-monitoring equipment out of the hands of IAEA inspectors by claiming that Iran had sold it and that there was no trace of it.

Iran also got hold of a confidential IAEA document based on Western intelligence information that included questions the IAEA wanted to ask about Iran's so-called Green Salt project.

Green Salt was a small-scale way of producing tetrafluoride, an intermediate step in the process of producing feed material for uranium enrichment. The IAEA was concerned for years that Iran had worked on the project to give it the chance to produce nuclear fuel in a covert site, alongside any publicly declared enriched-uranium facilities.

The Journal received access to the documents from a Middle East intelligence agency that hails from a country that opposes Iran's nuclear program.

At a Senate hearing Wednesday, U.S. Special Envoy Robert Malley, the Biden administration's chief negotiator in the nuclear talks, said Iran's past evasion of the IAEA investigations was one of the reasons previous U.S. administration had placed hefty sanctions on Iran.

Asked by Sen. Todd Young (R. Ind.) about the Journal's report, Mr. Malley said, "Senator, did Iran lie? Of course. Did Iran have a covert nuclear program? Absolutely."

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said the Journal report "was additional proof" that Iran was trying to advance toward obtaining nuclear weapons.

"The systematic policy of fraud, theft and concealing evidence by Iran against the IAEA should now become a definitive fact in the eyes of the international community," he said in a statement.

While the U.S. and IAEA allege that Iran has been evasive about its nuclear work, the agency over time has pieced together many elements of Iran's activities. In 2011, [the IAEA published detailed information](#) about Iran's suspected past nuclear-weapons work, including many of the elements touched on in the documents Tehran obtained.

In 2015, in [a report issued as a condition of the nuclear deal](#), the IAEA concluded that Iran had a "coordinated effort" in place to work on nuclear weapons until at least 2003.

Iran's alleged stonewalling of the IAEA's investigations continues to cast a shadow over the Biden administration and European countries' efforts to revive the 2015 Iranian nuclear deal, which the Trump administration left in 2018. Talks have stalled in recent weeks on reviving the pact.

Iran wants the IAEA's continuing investigations into its past nuclear-weapons work closed before a deal is restored. The IAEA and Iran agreed to intensive talks this spring with an aspiration for the agency to have enough clarity on Iran's nuclear work that the IAEA board of member states could close the investigation in June. But [Iran has continued to stall the probe](#), IAEA officials said.

"Iran, for the time being, has not been forthcoming in the kind of information we need from them," IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi said to the European Parliament earlier this month.

One former George W. Bush administration official who worked on Iran issues said Washington officials had long suspected that Tehran was seeking access to IAEA documents at the time but there was never any proof.

"There was substantial concern about Iran penetrating the IAEA and using the material it acquired to misdirect the inspections and hide its violations of the Safeguards Agreement," said the official.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Big cities lost more residents in pandemic
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/big-u-s-cities-lost-more-residents-as-pandemic-stretched-on-11653537661?mod=hp_lead_pos6
GIST	<p>Big-city population declines deepened across the U.S. last year as the pandemic continued sending Americans in search of more space, according to census figures released Thursday.</p> <p>The largest cities lost a greater share of residents than small- and midsize cities during the year that ended July 1, 2021, new estimates show. Collectively, in the nine cities with more than one million people, the population fell 1.7%, a loss of 419,000 residents. Only two cities in that group grew: Phoenix and San Antonio.</p> <p>New York, the nation's largest city, lost 3.5% of its residents, or about 305,000 people. The second-largest city, Los Angeles, lost 1%, or 41,000 people, while the third-largest, Chicago, lost 1.6%, or 45,000 people.</p> <p>San Francisco's population fell 6.3%, a loss of 55,000 people. It and Chicago have lost so many people that their populations have fallen close to their 2010 levels.</p> <p>Several large cities that had logged gains in recent years saw losses, including Denver, Nashville, Tenn., Seattle and Atlanta.</p> <p>The nation's midsize cities, or those with populations of 500,000 up to one million, also saw their populations edge down. Together, they declined 0.7%, losing 148,000 people. The group includes 28 cities, with San Jose, Calif., the biggest and Kansas City, Mo., the smallest. Twelve of the 28 in the group grew last year.</p>

Cities with fewer than a half-million people in effect saw flat growth. The group that ranges from 250,000 up to a half-million residents collectively lost 0.1% of its population, while those with 100,000 up to 250,000 people together grew 0.1%.

The onset of the pandemic in March 2020 set off an initial wave of moves out of cities. The latest census figures suggest that the shift continued as the pandemic dragged on and combined with other economic and demographic forces that began pushing Americans into suburbs and exurbs during the previous decade.

Millennials, born between 1981 and 1996, are entering their prime childbearing years, prompting many to seek family-friendly homes in better school districts. A protracted slump in housing construction and record low mortgage rates drove up housing prices, especially in coastal metro areas, prompting migration to lower-cost areas even before the pandemic. Many in the growing ranks of retired baby boomers also fed the shift, as they cashed out of more- crowded, higher-priced markets.

The pandemic accelerated the shift in ways that are proving to be lasting. Some employers are making temporary pandemic remote-work options permanent. For some Americans, the pandemic reshuffled priorities in ways that made city living no longer worth its drawbacks, including higher taxes and elevated crime.

Elizabeth Scott, a 38-year-old economic-strategy consultant, was raising two daughters in Portland, Ore., in a two-bedroom house near downtown when she found out she was pregnant at the start of the pandemic. The family no longer fit in their house. Their cars were broken into while parked in their driveway. She watched as homelessness worsened.

“We just couldn’t do it anymore,” said Ms. Scott, who had lived in Portland for over a decade. “I didn’t like going for a run anymore. I didn’t like going downtown. All of the things we had moved originally for, it wasn’t worth the risk.”

Both Ms. Scott and her husband, a software developer, had worked remotely even before the pandemic. Early last year, she was assigned a project to help attract talent to the state of Michigan. She was intrigued by a pitch from officials in the state’s Upper Peninsula, who touted the area’s public schools, abundant outdoor recreational activities, a strong fiber-optic network thanks to Michigan Technological University and an airport with regular flights to Chicago.

“I hung up the phone and said to my husband, ‘I think I found it,’ ” she recalled. ““We’re going to move to the UP.””

Last June, they made an offer on a large house sight unseen in Houghton, Mich., on a 4-acre property, with room for an office for each of them and guests to stay. Daycare for their 18-month-old son costs about half what it did in Portland.

“We absolutely love it,” she said. “We didn’t go to Houghton for a job. We chose it because it had everything we wanted.”

Kelly Zara, 45, had lived in St. Louis for more than 15 years when the city’s pandemic restrictions prompted her family to uproot for a smaller city. Ms. Zara, an infection-prevention specialist at a hospital, said she wasn’t confident city schools would reopen for her two daughters to attend elementary school in person in the fall of 2020. City parks were closed, and the family’s small yard provided little space for her girls to play outside.

“That was the tipping point for me,” Ms. Zara said. “I felt like they were not supporting and trying to keep the things that attracted people to the city open.”

In August 2020, she and her husband sold their four-bedroom brick bungalow in the city’s Tilles Park neighborhood and bought a house in O’Fallon, Mo., a smaller city about 35 miles west of St. Louis. Their

	<p>new house is roughly twice as big, with twice as much yard, but their mortgage payment is only a few hundred dollars a month more in part because they lowered their interest rate.</p> <p>Ms. Zara said she was thrilled with the new public school where she enrolled her daughters, ages 8 and 11 years old, and she feels as though there is a lot to discover outside the city. “Until the kids are grown, we’ll be here,” she said.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/26 Killed IRGC officer involved in brutal plots
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/iranian-officer-killed-in-tehran-was-involved-in-plot-to-kill-israeli-diplomat-u-s-general-people-familiar-with-matter-say-11653536259?mod=lead feature below a pos1
GIST	<p>An Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps officer shot and killed outside his Tehran home led the group’s efforts to assassinate opponents of Iran around the world, including recent failed plots to kill an Israeli diplomat, an American general and a French intellectual, according to people familiar with the matter.</p> <p>The officer, Col. Hassan Sayyad Khodaei, planned kidnappings and killings for an arm of the IRCG known as Quds Force Unit 840, the people said. They said he recruited agents to carry out operations globally, including in Colombia and Cyprus, mostly against Israeli targets but also aimed at people from other countries viewed as hostile by Iran.</p> <p>Col. Khodaei was involved in a foiled plot to kill Israeli businessmen in Cyprus in the fall of 2021, according to some of the people. Cypriot authorities arrested an Azerbaijani national in connection with the killing who was found with a pistol in his possession. The suspect has denied the allegations and is going to trial, according to the Associated Press. Iran denied any involvement in the incident.</p> <p>Some of the people familiar with the matter said they didn’t know if any of the operations allegedly planned by Col. Khodaei had resulted in any targeted person’s death. No one has claimed responsibility for killing Col. Khodaei.</p> <p>In a letter to the United Nations on Wednesday, Iran called on the international community to “condemn such brutal assassinations targeting innocent citizens of other countries.” The letter also described Mr. Khodaei as “a member of the Iranian Armed Forces who played a significant role in the fight against terrorism and Daesh in the region.” Daesh is the Arabic acronym for Islamic State.</p> <p>Without elaborating, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett’s office said in April that Israel’s spy agency, the Mossad, with the help of allied intelligence organizations, had foiled dozens of similar attacks over the past year, all planned by the IRGC.</p> <p>The prime minister’s office said the Mossad had thwarted efforts to set up hit teams to kill the Israeli diplomat in Turkey, the U.S. general in Germany and a French writer who was identified by people familiar with the matter as Bernard-Henri Lévy.</p> <p>U.S. military officials declined to comment on the alleged plan to try to kill an American general. Iran’s foreign ministry declined to comment. The Iranian delegation at the United Nations in New York didn’t respond to a request for comment.</p> <p>Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi on Monday blamed the killing of Col. Khodaei on “global arrogance,” a term usually applied to the U.S., which Iran accuses of supporting hostile acts by its enemies such as Israel. “I have no doubt that revenge for the pure blood of this martyr on the hands of the criminals is inevitable,” Mr. Raisi said on state television Monday.</p> <p>The Revolutionary Guard, which is responsible for Iran’s military operations abroad, called Col. Khodaei the “defender of the shrine,” a term used by Iranian media to describe soldiers fighting in Iraq and Syria.</p>

	<p>“There is a Cold War between Israel and Iran,” said an Iranian official. “It’s only a matter of time before Iran retaliates.”</p> <p>Israel has said it would respond to Iranian aggression abroad inside Iran.</p> <p>“The campaign to weaken Iran has begun,” said Mr. Bennett in a speech in February at the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv. “This campaign is being conducted in multiple fields: nuclear, economic, cyber, overt and covert operations, both by ourselves and in collaboration with others.”</p> <p>Israel has carried out a series of attacks in recent years that have hit Iran’s nuclear and military programs, according to people familiar with the campaign. Iran accused Israel of killing one of its top nuclear scientists in 2020 and carrying out an attack on its underground nuclear program at Natanz in 2021.</p> <p>The killing of Col. Khodaei comes amid a yearslong shadow war in the air, land, sea and cyber arenas between Israel and Iran, with Israel expanding its operations in Iran beyond its protracted attempts to stifle the country’s nuclear program. In turn, Iran has struck out more brazenly against what it calls Israeli targets, including a rocket attack earlier this year against alleged Israeli intelligence sites in northern Iraq.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/25 Rising rates batter mortgage lenders
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/rising-rates-are-battering-mortgage-lenders-11653471002?mod=hp_lista_pos4
GIST	<p>Mortgage lenders are scrambling to survive a sharp drop-off in the number of homeowners refinancing their loans, with demand drying up as interest rates rise.</p> <p>Mortgage giants including Wells Fargo & Co. and Rocket Cos. have trimmed staff this spring. Online lender Better.com has laid off or offered buyouts to about half of its workforce since last December.</p> <p>While home prices continue to rise and Americans are still buying houses, the drop-off in refinancing activity is a giant blow because refinancings made up the bulk of U.S. mortgage originations throughout the pandemic.</p> <p>Some lenders are considering selling themselves, convinced it is the only way to make it through, according to industry executives and advisers.</p> <p>“Many lenders are losing money and have the prospect of losing money for the foreseeable future,” said Steve Stein, a former executive at Stearns Lending, a mortgage company based in Lewisville, Texas. “Partnering up could be a good strategic alternative.”</p> <p>Last month, Mr. Stein and former Stearns Chief Executive David Schneider launched an advisory firm to guide what they believe will be a wave of lenders looking to stay afloat.</p> <p>Some lenders are selling assets, such as their rights to collect mortgage payments. Others are trying to drum up business by offering lower rates or cutting their fees. In March, mortgage lenders made \$2.36 in profit on every \$100 of a loan, the smallest amount since 2019, according to the Urban Institute. In 2020, that figure was as high as \$5.99.</p> <p>“You saw lenders panic a bit with the decline” in originations, said Richard Martin, director of real-estate lending solutions at Curinos, a financial-services research firm.</p> <p>The mortgage market’s slowdown is another consequence of the Federal Reserve’s attempts to curb red-hot inflation. The Fed has raised interest rates twice this year to try to cool the economy, and it ended its largest mortgage-bond buying program this spring. That has pushed up borrowing costs for mortgages, drying up the pandemic refinancing boom and even shoving some would-be home buyers out of the market.</p>

Originations at the 50 largest lenders fell 41% in the first quarter from a year earlier, according to industry-research firm Inside Mortgage Finance. Mortgage volume is expected to fall 37% in 2022, according to the Mortgage Bankers Association, driven by the drop in refinancings.

It could get worse: The housing market still looks hot by historical standards, and home prices are still rising. But the Fed's moves have raised questions about whether the U.S. is headed toward a recession, which would likely slow home sales and make it difficult for some homeowners to keep up with their monthly payments. April's seasonally adjusted annual rate of home sales was [the lowest since June 2020](#).

"It's like the music has stopped," said Jeff Taylor, a managing partner at Mphasis Digital Risk, a consulting firm that works with mortgage lenders on technology and risk.

The average rate on a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage was 5.25% as of last week, according to mortgage-finance giant [Freddie Mac](#), up from 3.11% near the beginning of the year, an increase that [can add hundreds of dollars each month](#) to a new buyer's borrowing costs.

The pain is expected to be especially bad for nonbank mortgage lenders. Unlike banks, they don't have numerous business lines to carry them through mortgage downturns. They also don't take deposits, which means they are reliant on short-term loans. Seven of the 10 largest refinance lenders in 2021 were nonbanks, according to Inside Mortgage Finance.

A few nonbanks are big names, such as Rocket, which is [now the biggest mortgage lender in the U.S.](#), but there are thousands of smaller lenders scattered throughout the country. They are often the preferred route to homeownership for moderate-income families or first-time home buyers. Nonbanks issued about 70% of U.S. mortgages last year, the highest share on record, according to Inside Mortgage Finance.

It is common for lenders to lay off workers when interest rates rise, [like they did in 2018](#), and then hire again when rates fall. However, in the run-up to 2008, mortgage companies instead lowered lending standards to keep volume high, laying the seeds for the global financial crisis. This time around, lenders have kept their standards for mortgage loans relatively strict.

"It's been decades since rates rose so quickly, so it's kind of a shock," said Tom Millon, CEO of Computershare Loan Services, a mortgage-service provider.

Some of the measures lenders are taking to stem the bleeding are short-term solutions. Cash from the sale of servicing rights—by which a company earns fees for performing the back-office job of collecting monthly payments—can help pad lenders' bottom line. But selling those rights also means giving up a steady stream of income.

Amerifirst Home Mortgage, based in Kalamazoo, Mich., has sold close to \$1 billion in servicing rights since the beginning of the year, CEO Mark Jones said, after selling none in 2021.

"We're going to tweak here and there and cut expenses and just kind of mark our time until enough players exit the market or the market comes back up," Mr. Jones said.

Shares of [loanDepot](#) Inc. are down 43% this year, and shares of Rocket, [UWM Holdings](#) Corp. and [Guild Holdings](#) Co. have lost between 29% and 38%, all worse than the S&P 500's drop of 17%. At least eight big mortgage lenders have gone public during the pandemic, and all of their current share prices have fallen below their IPO price.

Rocket said it offered buyouts to several thousand employees this spring. The company has been working to get more of its business from purchase mortgages, which are typically less dependent on

	<p>interest rates. Refinances accounted for an estimated 82% of Rocket’s originations in 2021, according to Inside Mortgage Finance.</p> <p>Banks aren’t immune to the stress. Wells Fargo and JPMorgan Chase & Co. laid off mortgage employees this year, the banks said. Wells Fargo said in a statement that the layoffs were “the result of cyclical changes in the broader home lending environment.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/25 Russia forces expand Donbas assault
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russian-forces-expand-donbas-assault-but-at-steep-cost-11653472850?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos2
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine—Russian forces were pushing to encircle two cities in eastern Ukraine on Wednesday, part of an all-out assault to take control of the Donbas area, which is making progress but at a cost for Moscow.</p> <p>Fighting was centered around two cities on either side of the Siverskyi Donets River, Severodonetsk and Lysychansk. The two cities are among the easternmost parts of Donbas that Ukrainian forces still control.</p> <p>Speaking on Ukrainian television Wednesday morning, Serhiy Haidai, governor of Luhansk province, where both cities are located, said the situation for Ukrainian forces in Severodonetsk was dire.</p> <p>“The city is being destroyed,” Mr. Haidai said. “Yesterday, there were fights on the outskirts of the city. Our guys are holding on, but [Russian President Vladimir] Putin set a goal for his army to capture the Luhansk region, no matter what cost.”</p> <p>The shelling in Severodonetsk was so heavy, he said in another TV interview, that the city could soon be reduced to rubble.</p> <p>Russia’s focus on Severodonetsk, a city of 100,000 people, shows just how much its ambitions have been scaled back since the start of the war.</p> <p>In the early weeks of the invasion, Russian forces pushed to take Kyiv and Kharkiv, Ukraine’s two largest cities. But Kyiv never fell, and now Kharkiv is back under Ukrainian control. Kharkiv reopened its subway system earlier this week, after pushing Russian forces largely out of artillery range. Russia now is concentrating on Donbas, the industrial area on Ukraine’s eastern edge, where fighting has been ongoing since 2014.</p> <p>Russian forces are making progress in Donbas. Ukrainian military units have pulled out of Svitlodarsk, another city in Donbas, and earlier this week, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that up to 100 Ukrainian soldiers could be killed each day in the battle for the area.</p> <p>But Russia is paying a steep price for the gains it has made. The Kremlin is sending units from southern Ukraine to fight in Donbas, according to Ukrainian officials, and losing so many men that continued Ukrainian resistance could eventually force it to shift strategies again.</p> <p>Ukraine’s Defense Ministry said Wednesday morning that nine attacks had been repelled in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, which together form Donbas. Dozens of Russian vehicles were destroyed, the ministry said, including three tanks.</p> <p>Mr. Haidai said that holding Severodonetsk would be crucial for Ukraine’s efforts to stop any further Russian advances, adding that the heavy casualties would eventually force Moscow to ease the assault.</p> <p>“They are no more bulletproof than anyone else,” he said of the Russian soldiers. “If they do not succeed during this week—by Saturday, Sunday—they will get tired, and the situation will at least stabilize for us.”</p>

In [a video released on Twitter](#) early Wednesday, fighters claiming to be from the Donetsk People's Republic, a pro-Russian breakaway area, said they had already sustained heavy losses, and didn't want to fight for Russia in Luhansk, after already having fought to take Mariupol, a port city on the Sea of Azov, which is adjacent to the Black Sea.

"We refuse to go to the slaughter," one fighter says in the video. "We don't want to be cannon fodder."

As Moscow seeks to boost morale and replenish its manpower for its offensive, [Mr. Putin visited wounded soldiers](#) at a Moscow hospital, his first known visit since the war began, and the Russian parliament adopted a bill lifting age limits for enlisting in the military.

Elsewhere Wednesday morning, four rockets struck the outskirts of the [Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia](#), which has remained relatively safe since the start of the invasion, even as surrounding areas came under Russian control. Local Ukrainian officials said at least one person was killed in the attack. Moscow said this week that it would focus on expanding its occupation in the southeastern Ukrainian region.

Mr. Putin signed a decree Wednesday to enable residents of occupied areas of the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions in southern Ukraine to apply for [Russian passports](#). A swath of southern Ukraine, including almost all of its Kherson region and the majority of its Zaporizhzhia region, has been under [Russian military rule](#) since early March. Russia has already distributed passports to residents of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic and a similar area in the Luhansk region.

As fighting continues, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko said Moscow was willing to consider a potential prisoner swap with Kyiv, but only after legal proceedings directed at Ukrainian prisoners are finished.

"We will consider all things once the surrendered have been convicted and sentenced, and then there may be some other steps," Mr. Rudenko said Wednesday in comments carried by Russian state media. "Before that, talk of an exchange is premature."

A potential swap could include Vadim Shishimarin, a Russian soldier who was recently convicted of premeditated murder and sentenced to life in prison in [Ukraine's first war-crimes trial](#) since the invasion began in February.

Mr. Rudenko's remarks come just days after Russia's Ministry of Defense said a group of 531 Ukrainian soldiers, the last of a battalion that held out against a Russian siege at an industrial complex in Mariupol surrendered. In all, 2,439 soldiers turned themselves over to Russian forces at [the Azovstal steel plant](#), Russia said.

Speaking via videoconference at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, on Wednesday morning, Mr. Zelensky said Ukraine would continue fighting until it reclaimed all territories that had been seized from it, even ground lost in 2014, the year [Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula](#).

Mr. Zelensky said he doesn't think Mr. Putin is fully aware of what is going on in Ukraine and only when he "understands reality" could there be a diplomatic solution to the conflict.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov has insisted that Mr. Putin is fully on top of events in Ukraine. In March, the presidential spokesman said that it was Washington that lacked real information about Mr. Putin and the Kremlin, and such misunderstandings could result in "wrong decisions, in careless decisions that have very bad consequences."

Meanwhile, European leaders are searching for ways to export Ukrainian grain supplies, which have been trapped in the country, fueling bread shortages in countries like Egypt.

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said Poland is pushing the U.S. and European Union to help rapidly expand the rail infrastructure needed to export [Ukraine's looming grain harvest](#), circumventing Russia's naval chokehold in the Black Sea.

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres is pursuing a high-stakes deal with Russia, Turkey and other nations to open up Ukrainian food exports to world markets and stave off [a potential global food shortage](#).

Mr. Rudenko, the Russian deputy foreign minister, said that Russia stands ready to establish a humanitarian corridor that would provide safe passage for ships carrying food from Ukrainian ports, but only if some sanctions are lifted.

"Solving the food problem requires a comprehensive approach, including the lifting of sanctions that were imposed on Russian exports and financial transactions," Mr. Rudenko said.

Mr. Rudenko said that Moscow has been in touch with the U.N. on the matter. However, he didn't elaborate on how a potential corridor would work in practice and appeared to rule out the involvement of Western vessels, saying "this would seriously exacerbate the situation in the Black Sea region."

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba stressed the importance of finding a way to ease Russia's blockade of Ukrainian grain shipments to avert an international food catastrophe, but also warned against striking a deal with Moscow.

"We cannot allow the interruption of the agricultural cycle in Ukraine because that would mean a multiyear global food crisis," Mr. Kuleba said Wednesday. "But in the end, the problem is, you cannot trust Russia even when they sign a paper guaranteeing safe passage."

Russia said it has opened the port of Mariupol. The port, and the sea around it, were cleared of mines before a so-called humanitarian corridor for foreign vessels was opened on Wednesday, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told the state news agency RIA. Five foreign ships have sailed out of the port using the two-nautical-mile wide corridor, according to the report.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 China top 2 leaders diverge on Covid
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-top-two-leaders-diverge-in-messaging-on-covid-impact-11653486508?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1
GIST	<p>BEIJING—When China's top two leaders sought to reassure foreign executives increasingly frustrated over the country's stringent Covid-control measures last week, Chinese leadership seemed to be speaking with two voices.</p> <p>On May 18, President Xi Jinping spoke by video about economic challenges the world faces as a result of the pandemic but made little mention of China's own economic downturn—which has been exacerbated by the costs of China's stringent measures to combat Covid outbreaks. A day later, in an in-person meeting, Premier Li Keqiang struck a more candid and conciliatory tone, focusing his remarks largely on China's own issues.</p> <p>Speaking to a group of senior representatives for American, European and Asian multinationals operating in China, Mr. Li said China is "committed to striking a balance" between reviving the economy and containing repeated Covid-19 outbreaks, said people who attended the meeting with Mr. Li, held at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing.</p> <p>Of particular note, some participants said, Mr. Li didn't defend Mr. Xi's zero-Covid strategy, in a departure from recent meetings that foreign executives have had with senior Chinese officials, including some involved in trade and commerce.</p>

Instead, in response to foreign executives' recommendation that China vaccinate more of its population, especially the elderly, Mr. Li said, according to participants: "I hear your message about vaccines, and we will expand vaccination coverage."

"We can't have companies stopping their operations," the premier added.

China's adherence to Mr. Xi's zero-Covid policy has resulted in a combination of lockdowns, mass testing and quarantines. That has crushed business activity—and made it harder to vaccinate the public, especially China's large elderly population, a weakness in the country's Covid-19 defenses that health officials have publicly acknowledged. During much of the two-month-long lockdown of Shanghai, an economic hub of more than 25 million people, most vaccination centers and programs were suspended.

As of mid-March, just 51% of Chinese people over 80 [had received two Covid-19 vaccine doses](#), compared with roughly 88% for the overall population.

While Mr. Xi has talked about the need to enhance global cooperation on vaccine development, he hasn't publicly emphasized the importance of vaccinating China's population.

Mr. Li's remarks don't openly challenge Mr. Xi's approach to the pandemic. But the comments exposed what government officials and policy advisers describe as simmering tensions among top Communist Party officials over Mr. Xi's commitment to his zero-Covid strategy.

"Li clearly wants a different focus," said one of the participants in the May 19 meeting with the premier.

The State Council Information Office, which handles press inquiries for senior leaders, didn't respond to questions.

It couldn't be determined if Mr. Li, the long-sidelined premier whose political leverage [is enjoying a late renaissance](#) of sorts, could push for any meaningful changes in China's Covid strategy.

Mr. Xi appeared mindful of the cost of China's Covid lockdowns earlier this year and sought to give Shanghai some leeway to tackle local outbreaks without shutting down the entire city, people familiar with the matter have said. But he [reaffirmed the zero-tolerance policy](#) at a leadership meeting in early May as the highly transmissible Omicron variant spread across the country.

After nearly a month of Shanghai's lockdown, the head of China's National Health Commission, in a front-page article in the Communist Party-run Study Times, credited Mr. Xi with having "personally commanded" China's Covid-19 plan.

The zero-Covid approach proved effective at both containing outbreaks and getting the economy humming again earlier in the pandemic, underpinning Mr. Xi's view that China has managed the virus better than the West. Changing policy would be politically untenable for the top leader, government officials and advisers say, in a year when he is seeking a tradition-breaking third term in power.

As a major Communist Party conclave set for later this year draws closer, where a new slate of leadership will be unveiled, "competition over the future direction of China's Covid response has intensified," said Yanzhong Huang, a senior fellow for global health at the Council on Foreign Relations.

In his video meeting with the foreign executives, Mr. Xi gave no indication of changing the current zero-Covid policy, and the executives weren't invited to ask him questions.

"The pandemic that has been going on unabated is posing a serious threat to the life and health of the people, and taking a heavy toll on the world economy," Mr. Xi said, according to China's Foreign Ministry. Some participants said his comments seemed detached from the fact that many Western economies have bounced back from the pandemic relatively well and that China's economy is now facing some of the greatest pressure.

Since the outbreak of Omicron in Shanghai and other parts of China this year, China's economy has slowed dramatically, causing widespread public frustration and prompting some foreign companies to reconsider their investments in China.

Apple Inc., for example, has told outside contractors it wants to boost production outside China, citing Beijing's Covid approach as one reason, people involved in those discussions have said.

Industry groups representing Western firms in China have stepped up their calls for Beijing to change its pandemic policies, saying longstanding curbs on travel and other restrictions are hurting profits, thwarting investment and causing an exodus of foreign executives.

As many as 23% of European businesses are considering moving their operations out of China, the highest proportion in a decade, according to a survey released by the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China in early May. The chamber has urged authorities to shift their Covid-control strategy from lockdowns to vaccination.

"The world is not waiting for China," Joerg Wuttke, president of the EU chamber, said in an interview.

Meanwhile, a survey published by the American Chamber of Commerce in China this month shows that more than 50% of American businesses have either delayed or decreased their investments in China due to recent outbreaks and repeated lockdowns.

U.S. investment in China had already plateaued in the past decade, hovering between \$13 billion and \$16 billion a year, as China's growth slowed and economic reform stalled, according to a 2021 study by the Atlantic Council and Rhodium Group.

Mr. Li's message to the foreign business community also comes as he tries to exert greater control over the management of China's economy as his term as premier nears its end. In recent months, he has helped dial back some of Mr. Xi's measures that steered China away from Western-style capitalism and contributed to the slowdown, while trying influence the decision on who his successor will be.

Mr. Li's remarks to the foreign executives were made during a meeting marking the 70th anniversary of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, a government-backed trade body.

Throughout the meeting, which lasted 1.5 hours, Mr. Li didn't mention Mr. Xi's zero-Covid policy once, said participants. As soon as he walked into the meeting room at Diaoyutai, he took his mask off. And after he ended the meeting and talked to participants on his way out, his staff reminded him to put the mask back on.

Some participants in the meeting said Mr. Li's seeming disregard of Beijing's strict mask-wearing protocols was noteworthy.

Mr. Li appeared concerned when foreign business representatives talked about how China's Covid strategy is leaving the country increasingly isolated, took notes and told the attendees to tell their governments that China is closely listening to the issues raised.

"This is a special moment, and a difficult moment," he said at the meeting, according to participants.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 Other nations changed course on guns
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/25/world/europe/gun-laws-australia-britain.html
GIST	The world over, mass shootings are frequently met with a common response: Officials impose new restrictions on gun ownership. Mass shootings become rarer. Homicides and suicides tend to decrease, too.

After a British gunman killed 16 people in 1987, the country banned semiautomatic weapons like those he had used. It did the same with most handguns after a 1996 school shooting. It now has one of the lowest gun-related death rates in the developed world.

In Australia, a 1996 massacre prompted mandatory gun buybacks that saw, according to [some estimates](#), as many as one million firearms melted into slag. The rate of mass shootings [plummeted](#) from once every 18 months to, so far, [only one](#) in the 26 years since.

Canada also tightened gun laws after a 1989 mass shooting. So did Germany in 2002, New Zealand in 2019 and Norway last year.

Only the United States, whose rate and severity of mass shootings is [without parallel](#) outside of conflict zones, has so consistently refused to answer those events with [tightened gun laws](#).

Though such restrictions have always brought some controversy, most were broadly embraced by voters in other countries.

Even in Australia, where conservative-leaning politics and rural traditions had long favored gun ownership, citizens broadly accepted the buyback. Some even surrendered weapons they were legally permitted to keep, in a show of support for their country's tightening gun laws.

Every mass shooting is, in some sense, a fringe event, driven by one-off factors like the ideology or personal circumstances of the shooter. The risk is impossible to fully erase.

Still, the record is clear, confirmed by [reams of studies](#) that have analyzed the effects of policies like Britain's and Australia's: When countries tighten gun control laws, it leads to fewer guns in private citizens' hands, which leads to less gun violence — and to fewer mass shootings.

Britain: Sweeping Bans

Britain today has one of the strictest gun control regimes in the developed world, with even many police unarmed. But it was not always that way.

The country's history of sport hunting had ingrained a long cultural tradition of gun ownership, especially in rural areas.

That began to change in 1987, with the so-called Hungerford massacre, named for the small English town where it took place. A 27-year-old local man used two semiautomatic rifles and a handgun, which he owned legally, to kill 16 people. His motives remain unclear.

Britain's Conservative government swiftly banned rifles like those he had used and mandated that shotgun owners register the weapons with police.

The 1996 school shooting in a small Scottish town, where a local man killed 15 students and one teacher, prompted more sweeping changes. A government inquiry recommended restricting access to handguns.

The Conservative government went even further, banning all but the smallest-caliber handguns, which a subsequent Labour government banned the next year.

The reforms also require owners of permitted firearms to pass a strict licensure process, which involves interviews and home visits by local police, who can deny approval if they deem the would-be owner a potential public safety risk.

Mass shootings did not completely disappear in Britain: An attacker killed 12 in 2010, and another killed five in 2021. But all forms of gun-related violence have dropped significantly.

Today, there are about five guns per 100 people in Britain (except in Northern Ireland, where this number is higher), one of the [lowest rates in the developed world](#). The gun homicide rate is about 0.7 per million, also one of the lowest.

Australia: Nationwide Buybacks

American gun control activists often cite Australia's sweeping buybacks. Though no country rivals the United States' gun ownership rate, which is more than double that of second-place Yemen, Australia has had similar cultural and political affinities for gun ownership.

Despite this, after a mass shooting in 1996 in which a gunman killed 35 people in the town of Port Arthur, authorities successfully imposed sweeping new restrictions.

The nationwide buyback ultimately took between one in five and one in three privately held guns out of circulation. This mostly targeted guns like semiautomatic rifles and many shotguns that, under new laws, were no longer permitted.

The country also reframed gun ownership from being an inherent right, as it is in only a handful of countries like the United States, to becoming a privilege that citizens had to affirmatively earn.

Australia's would-be gun owners now face a national registry, a 28-day wait period and a licensing process that requires demonstrating a valid reason for owning a gun.

Since then, mass shootings have effectively disappeared in Australia. What was once an almost annual event has only happened once since the reforms, with a 2018 attack that left seven dead.

But the greater impact may have been on other forms of violence. A [2011 survey](#) of crime and suicide data concluded that the program "seems to have been incredibly successful in terms of lives saved."

Australia's gun-related homicide rate subsequently halved, as did the rate of firearm suicides, the study found. Non-firearm homicides and suicides did not increase. Subsequent research [confirmed](#) these findings.

The reforms were [initially controversial](#), including within the ranks of the conservative government that passed them, as well as some rural communities. But fears of electoral backlash or even violent resistance — Australia's prime minister, John Howard, wore a bulletproof vest during one address — never materialized.

"Few Australians would deny that their country is safer today as a consequence of gun control," [Mr. Howard wrote in 2013 in The New York Times](#).

Still, Australian gun ownership rates have [crept back up](#) in recent years, as have rates of gun-related killings.

Canada and Norway: Gradual Change

Not all reforms have been as dramatic as Britain's or Australia's.

Canada tightened restrictions on gun ownership in response to a 1989 mass shooting that killed 14 female college students. Licenses became required for shotguns and rifles, and those firearms had to be registered with authorities. Similar rules already applied to handguns.

But the new rules, which proved controversial in rural communities, were not applied until 1995, six years after the shooting, and were mostly abolished in 2012.

While Canada's gun rules remain far stricter than those in the United States, they are looser than in most other countries. Its gun ownership rates, gun homicide rates and frequency of mass shootings all follow a similar pattern: a fraction of America's, but higher than in most other developed countries.

Norway, too, has moved relatively slowly in the wake of a 2011 far-right terrorist attack that killed 77 people.

Though the country has one of Europe's highest gun ownership rates, it has [relatively lower rates of gun-related violence](#). The country has had strict rules for years, including mandatory gun safety classes and an involved licensing process. But it took seven years after the 2011 massacre to enact [a ban on semiautomatic weapons](#) that was inspired by the attack. It went into effect at the end of last year.

New Zealand, which like Norway has traditionally had a high gun ownership rate but tight restrictions, along with low rates of gun violence, moved more quickly.

When a far-right extremist killed 50 mosquegoers in 2019, authorities took less than a week to announce a ban on military-style semiautomatic rifles and high-capacity magazines like those the attacker had used.

But Norway, New Zealand, Canada and Australia are all outliers in one important way: Each began with high rates of gun ownership, relatively few restrictions or both.

In most countries, there are fewer guns or pre-existing gun rights to restrict in the wake of a mass shooting — and, perhaps as a result, there are also [far fewer mass shootings in those countries](#).

Still, such governments often act. In Germany, after a gunman killed 16 people, the government raised the minimum age for carrying what few weapons were permitted to 21 years old, from 18.

When another attack hit Germany seven years later — both were exceedingly rare events in a country with little gun violence — lawmakers set new rules allowing for random police checks on gun owners.

With gun ownership already strictly controlled, there were simply few other measures left to impose.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 California approves new water restrictions
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/25/us/california-drought-water-restrictions.html
GIST	<p>Ten months ago, Gov. Gavin Newsom called for Californians to voluntarily cut water consumption by 15 percent. But that goal remains far off — water use has come down less than 4 percent — and the state's drought has only been getting worse.</p> <p>So state officials on Tuesday adopted emergency regulations aimed at delivering the most drastic statewide cuts to address the drought thus far.</p> <p>The rules require local water agencies to reduce water use by up to 20 percent and prohibit any watering of ornamental lawns at businesses and other commercial properties. Officials earlier this year announced penalties for watering yards after a rainstorm.</p> <p>The latest measures are part of an effort to push water suppliers toward what's "going to be needed in this new normal," said Laurel Firestone, a California State Water Resources Control Board member.</p> <p>"We are in this unprecedented drought. We need to act like it," Firestone said at Tuesday's board meeting. California's large reservoirs are depleted, and the snowpack has shrunk to 12 percent of what it usually is this time of year.</p> <p>Newsom warned that without significant reductions this summer, the state could enact even more cuts. In the previous drought, Jerry Brown, the governor at the time, ordered a mandatory 25 percent across-the-board reduction in urban water use.</p>

“California is facing a drought crisis and every local water agency and Californian needs to step up on conservation efforts,” Newsom said in a statement on Tuesday. “We all have to be more thoughtful about how to make every drop count.”

What exactly are the new regulations?

Two main provisions will most affect Californians:

The rules ban anyone from irrigating ornamental lawns at commercial and industrial properties with potable water. That doesn’t include your house’s yard, parks or sports fields, but it does include decorative turf at businesses and in common areas of housing subdivisions.

Second, each local water supplier must, by June 10, adopt rules aimed at cutting water usage by 10 to 20 percent. I’ll explain how that could play out below.

What new rules will my local water agency implement?

Most local water suppliers have contingency plans for water shortages, devised to account for up to six levels of action depending on the severity of the shortage.

Water regulators are calling for suppliers to adopt Level 2 of the plan, which is intended for a shortage of 10 percent to 20 percent. Actions could include limiting landscape irrigation to two days a week, requiring covers for pools and allowing restaurants to serve water only upon request.

Exactly which restrictions will be implemented in your city depend on what your local supplier has laid out in its plan.

Whom do the rules affect?

Before the new regulations were adopted on Tuesday, about half of California’s population was under water restrictions implemented by local agencies, according to the governor’s office.

These include the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California's recent [sweeping limits on outdoor watering](#) and the [city of Healdsburg’s ban on irrigating yards](#). Also on Tuesday, officials in Santa Clara County announced [fines of up to \\$10,000 for wasting water](#).

With the latest statewide mandates, every urban area throughout the state will be covered by a local plan for reducing water use. In other words, if you haven’t felt any cuts yet, you will soon.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 FDA: hobbled response baby formula crisis
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/may/25/fda-admits-hobbled-response-baby-formula-crisis/
GIST	<p>Top officials at the Food and Drug Administration admitted they took too long to respond to a baby formula shortage and were hobbled by bad decisions and problems related to COVID-19, including a whistleblower report about a formula factory that was lost in the mail.</p> <p>Top FDA officials and company executives from the nation’s three baby formula manufacturers answered questions Thursday from House lawmakers about a massive shortage triggered by the closure of one of the nation’s largest production plants and exacerbated by a slow government response.</p> <p>FDA Commissioner Robert M. Califf told lawmakers that government regulators made mistakes along the way that led to the prolonged production problems that have left shelves empty of baby formula.</p> <p>“The result is not what we would have wanted,” Mr. Califf said.</p> <p>When asked to rate his performance on a scale of 1 to 10, Mr. Califf gave himself “a 4 or a 5” but said FDA workers were on the job “nights and weekends working on this.”</p>

A key whistleblower report from a fired employee of a Sturgis, Michigan, formula plant that cited critical safety violations was lost in the FDA's mail system, Mr. Califf said, possibly because of staff shortages caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The mail glitch kept top FDA officials from finding out about the report for months.

It was mailed to the FDA's Detroit office on Oct. 26, but top FDA officials did not see it until Feb. 14.

FDA inspectors also delayed an inspection of the Sturgis plant in January because of repeated COVID-19 outbreaks among plant employees. The inspection was postponed as the FDA received three reports of infant illnesses with possible ties to powdered formula.

"The FDA's timeliness of interviewing the whistleblower and getting into the facility for a for-cause inspection was too slow, and some decisions in retrospect could have been more optimal," Mr. Califf told lawmakers.

Mr. Califf said FDA officials are conducting an investigation into the government's response to the whistleblower report, including the mail mishap, as well as the pace of the agency's effort to resolve safety problems at the Sturgis plant to speed the plant's reopening.

The Sturgis plant, owned by Abbott Nutrition, produces 20% of all formula on the U.S. market.

It was closed in February after infants were sickened with *Cronobacter sakazakii* bacteria after consuming powdered formula produced at the facility, although testing showed no direct ties to the plant.

Abbott at that time issued a major formula recall at the request of the FDA.

The FDA said a six-week government inspection of the plant found "significant, fundamental sanitation, building, and equipment issues," as well as the presence of *Cronobacter sakazakii*, but not the specific strain that sickened the four infants.

Mr. Califf described the violations at the plant, which included a leaking ceiling, as "beyond the pale."

The plant remains shuttered while Abbott satisfies a safety and sanitation agreement struck just last week with the Department of Justice.

Mr. Califf said the plant could be open by June 4. After that, company officials said, it will take six to eight weeks to begin moving formula onto store shelves.

Responding to angry lawmakers about the slow pace of the plant overhaul and reopening, Mr. Califf said the FDA "didn't meet the need" and blamed "a combination of leadership, money and technology."

President Biden this month invoked the rarely used Defense Production Act to enable U.S. military planes to ship formula from overseas.

Abbott Senior Vice President Christopher J. Calamari told lawmakers that the company had addressed 43 FDA "observations" to meet the June 4 reopening goal.

Mr. Calamari said Abbott is reviewing the whistleblower report.

"We don't know those allegations to be true," Mr. Calamari said.

Abbott officials said they learned about the whistleblower report in April, six months after it was sent to the FDA's Detroit office. They said the report was written by an employee who had been fired over safety violations.

Neither Mr. Califf nor Mr. Abbott provided specific reasons why the plant was not able to reopen sooner.

Mr. Abbott told lawmakers that the plant immediately addressed the violations found in the FDA inspection, which began on Jan. 31 and concluded on Feb. 18.

Mr. Califf, when asked about the three-month gap between the plant closure and the reopening agreement, told lawmakers that the plant violations were so bad that the government sought a consent decree from the Justice Department that gave the FDA greater control over the reopening.

“We didn’t have confidence that they would produce safe formula until we got control of the plant through a consent decree,” Mr. Califf said. “And a consent decree is a legal agreement involving the Department of Justice and the plant and the manufacturer that has to be negotiated.”

Mr. Calamari said the plant has infrequently been found to violate safety standards over the past decade and has worked to address the issues that the FDA wants to be addressed before the plant can reopen.

Cronobacter sakazakii is a naturally occurring bacteria, and no unopened can of the formula from the Sturgis plant was found to be contaminated with it.

Lawmakers told Mr. Calamari that Abbott should apologize to families for the plant closure and the formula shortage it has triggered.

“We’ve all heard about the inspections that were done and, quite frankly, it’s pretty disgusting,” said Rep. Jan Schakowsky, Illinois Democrat. “What we heard about the water on the floors and the water leaking from the ceiling and conditions that could lead to contamination, I don’t know how a company that has a reputation like yours, and a responsibility like yours, could actually get into a situation like that.”

Mr. Calamari said the plant has implemented broader testing requirements, replaced the factory floor and improved safety training for employees.

“We are very much aligned with the FDA on the standards and the process, steps, and what needs to be done in the facility, and we’re taking action on that right now,” Mr. Calamari said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 US: NKorea built up nuclear, missile power
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/may/25/north-korea-built-nuclear-missile-power-pandemic/
GIST	<p>North Korea continued to build missiles and nuclear weapons during the pandemic and now has nuclear missiles capable of striking the United States, the commander of U.S. Forces Korea disclosed recently in congressional testimony.</p> <p>Army Gen. Paul LaCamera, who also heads the United Nations Command and U.S.-South Korea joint forces command, stated in prepared testimony to the House Appropriations defense subcommittee that his forces are applying a new “integrated deterrence” strategy to prevent war with North Korea.</p> <p>“Our method of employing integrated deterrence is to weave together all the instruments of national power, the alliance, allies, and partners to make adversaries pause in their desire to challenge or injure us and our national interests,” Gen. LaCamera said in the testimony delivered on May 17.</p> <p>North Korea is continuing to develop nuclear weapons and advanced missile systems and is stepping up missile tests, the general said.</p> <p>Pyongyang launched three test missiles on Wednesday including one suspected of having intercontinental range. The flight tests followed President Biden’s visit to the region that ended Tuesday.</p> <p>North Korea “continues to pursue capabilities to hold our Korean and Japanese allies at risk with short- and medium-range missiles, hold U.S. strategic bases within the region at risk with intermediate-range</p>

missiles, and hold at risk the U.S. with its intercontinental ballistic missile program,” Gen. LaCamera stated.

During a defense exposition in October, the North Koreans unveiled a variety of missile systems that the general said indicated “greater range, accuracy, and lethality while shortening the missile load and launch time from legacy [North Korean] ballistic missile systems.”

The North Koreans have since fired an unprecedented number of missiles with varying ranges that demonstrated new systems with advanced warheads and maneuverability.

“We must assume that some of these systems are likely intended to be nuclear-capable,” Gen. LaCamera said, noting that two years ago the North Koreans showed off a new larger ICBM than those tested in 2017.

Another threat from North Korea involves cyber capabilities and other conventional and emerging asymmetric warfare tools.

North Korea last year was able to steal an estimated \$400 million in cryptocurrency, according to Gen. LaCamera, who said the money obtained by North Korea from cybercrime is helping to fund the regime’s nuclear missile programs rather than reducing hardships on the North Korean people.

“The regime’s serious commitment to aggressively pursue a weapons development program is noteworthy as it occurred during a period of extreme economic constraint resulting from years of sanctions, recent natural disasters, and of course the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic,” the general said.

Despite extreme secrecy by the Pyongyang regime, he said, “We assess that the pandemic has provided an opportunity to the regime’s leadership to consolidate and reorganize their economic activities, tighten the control over their general population, and enhance its power structure for the preservation of regime survivability.”

The North Korean regime “expended great resources and effort to advance the full range of its ballistic missiles with the intent of targeting the U.S. and defeating alliance missile defenses on the peninsula,” Gen. LaCamera said.

North Korea’s government for more than two years claimed zero cases of COVID-19. Earlier this month, the government disclosed that 1.7 million came down with fever and 62 had died in what state media said was the first outbreak. The disease, however, was not identified as COVID-19.

Gen. LaCamera, meanwhile, said the nearly 30,000 U.S. troops in South Korea, which is formally called the Republic of Korea (ROK), are having problems because of limits on training and exercises.

Three ground ranges in South Korea available for training have restrictions imposed by the Seoul government, and air forces must conduct training off the Korean peninsula.

“We need a combined U.S.-ROK solution that supports robust, day or night, live-fire and force-on-force training,” Gen. LaCamera said.

Another problem is limited access by U.S. military forces to the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense missile defense base in South Korea.

The U.S. military needs unfettered access to the site to provide logistical support and improve the quality of life for American soldiers posted to the site.

“Limited access also slows the pace of construction projects on site which is critical for maintaining the system’s capabilities, crew training, and upgrades,” Gen. LaCamera said. “All of this hinders the alliance’s

	<p>ability to operate this defensive system and defend the ROK people, as well as U.S. and ROK service members.”</p> <p>Gen. LaCamera also said he is concerned that his forces in South Korea are located at the end of a global supply chain that could impact combat readiness of essential munitions, ballistic missile defenses and pre-positioned wartime stocks.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/25 Millions risk losing healthcare: Medicaid
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/may/26/millions-risk-losing-us-healthcare-when-pandemic-emergency-declaration-expires
GIST	<p>When the US federal government’s pandemic health emergency declaration expires, millions of Americans are at risk of losing healthcare coverage through Medicaid with potentially devastating consequences.</p> <p>According to an analysis by the Kaiser Family Foundation, an estimated 5.3 million to 14.2 million could lose their Medicaid coverage when the Covid-19 public health emergency ends on 15 July if it is not extended.</p> <p>The analysts cited the wide range due to uncertainty on how states will respond to the end of continuous enrollment and how many people will lose coverage as a result. Medicaid enrollment is estimated to reach 110.2 million people by the end of fiscal year 2022, with enrollment expected to decline significantly when continuous enrollment ends.</p> <p>Dylan Brown of New Jersey is disabled and relies on Medicaid for a home aide he requires around the clock to be able to get out of bed, dress and feed himself. He constantly worries about losing his Medicaid and Social Security disability insurance due to income and asset eligibility requirements and is very concerned about losing Medicaid when continuous enrollment ends.</p> <p>“As I’ve been learning, trying to maintain my eligibility, you get a different story every time and you just have to hope one of them is right. And I’ve sort of been learning, none of them are really right,” said Brown.</p> <p>Without Medicaid, he would have to rely on his parents, who work full-time, to provide the care he needs and pay out of pocket for care to the extent his family could afford it. These options, Brown argued, aren’t feasible as he is planning to start law school this fall at Rutgers University, and his parents shouldn’t have to uproot their lives to help him function, which is the responsibility of Medicaid.</p> <p>“There shouldn’t be a cutoff date. There’s no reasonable argument for not giving disabled people the care they need to survive,” added Brown. “Regardless of what you’re feeling on whether people should have free healthcare, the disabled need it. There are no alternatives for us. It’s Medicaid or bust, and when the Medicaid rules are this convoluted and hard to keep track of, it almost feels like a full time job just keeping my benefits.”</p> <p>During the pandemic, the federal government required states to continuously enroll Medicaid recipients into the program, providing \$100.4 bn in new funds to cover the costs of doing so, halting coverage gaps and loss of eligibility for those who rely on healthcare coverage through Medicaid.</p> <p>The current pandemic health emergency declaration is set to expire in mid-July. It is expected to be extended again, but an extension date has yet to be set by the US Department of Health and Human Services.</p> <p>“Medicaid provided invaluable coverage to individuals during the pandemic. And there’s evidence that it helped insulate people from loss of coverage that is associated with job losses, especially in the early stages of the pandemic,” said Dr Eric T Roberts, assistant professor of health policy and management at</p>

the University of Pittsburgh. “Now, we face this unwinding of those provisions and a lot of confusion to beneficiaries and the public about how individuals will navigate that process and the schedule on which they will be required to do so. I think the great concern is that people lose their coverage without really knowing it, until they need it.”

Roberts said policymakers need to address these problems, as Medicaid determination and redetermination is complex already. Those complexities are magnified when states have to start conducting those determinations on such a large scale without the proper administrative and navigational assistance and resources in place.

“There is already a significant amount of administrative complexity to navigate Medicaid from the beneficiaries’ perspective and that can uniquely disadvantage people who have greater difficulty just navigating the healthcare system in general, the most vulnerable,” added Roberts.

Federal government subsidies to make healthcare plans more affordable on the insurance marketplace are expected to end on 31 December 2022, making health insurance plans more expensive, possibly resulting in more Americans losing health insurance coverage because they can’t afford it.

Zachary Fusfeld of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, a PhD candidate in epidemiology at Drexel University, is anticipating the loss of his Medicaid coverage when continuous enrollment ends, because his university stipend increase will put him over the income limit.

A type one diabetic who suffers from other illnesses, Fusfeld said he will have to rely on his student healthcare and pay out of pocket for copays on medications, medical supplies, and doctor visits when his Medicaid coverage ends later this year, the costs of which are not affordable and not covered by his pay increase.

He recently required surgery on his ankle and is worried about affording the physical therapy he requires, though he noted there are many people who are facing the loss of Medicaid and don’t have any sort of supplemental insurance coverage as he does.

“I’m really worried that I’m just not going to be able to properly manage my health and life in a way that I can stay as healthy as I need to be,” said Fusfeld.

Chris Bergh of St Louis, Missouri, relies on Social Security disability insurance for income and Medicaid for medical coverage. He’s concerned about the risk of losing medical coverage through Medicaid when the pandemic emergency is lifted.

“I’m at risk of losing coverage because I lost track of a piece of mail and the instructions in the letter were unclear about how I was supposed to proceed,” said Bergh.

He has repeatedly attempted to call Medicaid’s service hotline, but hasn’t been able to get through to speak to an actual person. Without Medicaid, he wouldn’t be able to see his doctors, afford his prescription medicine, or get dental care.

“I think they make this system harder than it has to be, in the hopes of weeding people out, just like other public assistance programs,” added Bergh. “I’m on social security so I have a fixed income and don’t make enough to cover the out of pocket cost of these things and still be able to eat and do other things.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Day 92 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/26/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-92-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ukraine’s foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, accused Nato of “doing literally nothing” in the face of Russia’s invasion of his country. Speaking at the World Economic Forum in

Davos, Kuleba praised the EU for its “revolutionary” decisions to back Kyiv [but said the Nato military alliance had been “completely sidelined”](#).

- **Ukraine has again pleaded for more weapons, including multiple launch rocket systems to match Russian firepower.** “We need the help of our partners - above all, weapons for Ukraine. Full help, without exceptions, without limits, enough to win,” president Volodymyr Zelenskiy said in his national [address](#). Kuleba added his country “badly” needs multiple launch rocket systems to match Russian firepower.
- **Zelenskiy rejected the notion that his country should cede territory to make peace with Russia.** “Symptomatic editorials began to appear in some western media stating that Ukraine must allegedly accept so-called difficult compromises by giving up territory in exchange for peace,” he said in his latest nightly [address](#). Those who advise Ukraine to give up territory fail to see the ordinary people, he said, “who actually live in the territory they propose to exchange for the illusion of peace.” Presidential adviser Oleksiy Arestovych added: “No one is going to trade a gram of our sovereignty or a millimetre of our territory. Our children are dying, soldiers are being blown apart by shells, and they tell us to sacrifice territory. Get lost. It’s never going to happen.”
- **Ukraine’s foreign ministry said Moscow’s plan to simplify the process of handing Russian citizenship to residents of Ukraine’s Russian-occupied regions [violates international law](#).** The ministry’s statement came after Russia’s president, Vladimir Putin, [signed a decree simplifying the process of handing Russian citizenship](#) to residents of Ukraine’s Russian-occupied Kherson and Zaporizhzhia region.
- **Russian forces have launched fresh assaults on towns in eastern Ukraine, with the city of Sievierodonetsk increasingly in danger of being totally encircled.** The governor of Luhansk region, Serhiy Haidai, [said the area was now without gas supplies and had limited water and electricity](#) after the last gas supply station was hit.
- **Police in Lysychansk are collecting bodies of people killed in order to bury them in mass graves,** Luhansk regional governor Serhiy Gaidai said. Some 150 people have been buried in a mass grave in one Lysychansk district, he added, Reuters reports.
- **Russian lawmakers have voted to approve a new law that would eliminate age limits for military contract soldiers.** Military experts [say Russia is facing unsustainable troop and equipment losses in Ukraine](#) after a series of military setbacks that have forced Moscow to reduce its war aims. Zelenskiy responded: “(They) no longer have enough young men, but they still have the will to fight.”
- **A senior United Nations official is due to visit Moscow in the coming days to discuss reviving fertiliser exports, Russia’s UN ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said,** stressing that the talks were not linked to a resumption of Ukrainian grain shipments, Reuters reported.
- **Two alleged Wagner Group fighters from Belarus have been [accused of murdering civilians near Kyiv](#), making them the first international mercenaries to face war crimes charges in Ukraine.** Ukrainian prosecutors have released the names and photographs of eight men wanted for alleged war crimes – including murder and torture – in the village of Motyzhyn. Several are believed to have fought in Syria.
- **Russia’s deputy foreign minister, Andrei Rudenko, said Moscow is ready to provide a humanitarian corridor for vessels carrying food to leave Ukraine, in return for the lifting of some sanctions.** [Ukraine’s Black Sea ports have been blocked since Russia invaded](#), with more than 20 million tonnes of grain stuck in silos in the country. Ukrainian foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, [poured scorn on Moscow’s claim](#) and [accused Russia of trying to “blackmail the world”](#).
- **Estonian prime minister Kaja Kallas said it would be “much more dangerous giving in to Putin than provoking him”** during a speech in Stockholm and warned: “All these seemingly small concessions to the aggressor lead to big wars. We have done this mistake already three times: Georgia, Crimea and Donbas.”
- **Russia’s foreign ministry spokesperson, Maria Zakharova, said an Italian peace plan for Ukraine was a “fantasy”.** Zakharova said at her weekly briefing: [“You can’t supply Ukraine with weapons with one hand](#) and come up with plans for a peaceful resolution of the situation with the other.”

HEADLINE	05/26 Ukraine pleads for more weapons
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/26/ukraine-pleads-for-more-weapons-to-tackle-russian-onslaught-in-donbas
GIST	<p>Fierce battles have continued to rage in eastern Ukraine with Russian troops on the verge of encircling a key industrial city, bringing a sharp rebuke of the west from Volodymyr Zelenskiy for not doing enough to help Kyiv win the war.</p> <p>As the Ukrainian military reported on Thursday that 40 towns in the Donbas region were under Russian bombardment, Luhansk governor Sergiy Gaiday described fighting outside Sievierodonetsk, a key military goal for Russia, as “very difficult”, saying Russian troops were shelling the city from the outskirts with mortars.</p> <p>“The coming week will be decisive,” Gaiday said in a video posted on Telegram, adding he believes Russia’s goal is to “capture the Luhansk region no matter what cost”.</p> <p>“There is a colossal amount of shelling,” he added.</p> <p>Having failed to seize Ukraine’s capital or its second city, Kharkiv, after invading in February, Russia is trying to take full control of the Donbas, comprised of two eastern provinces Moscow claims on behalf of separatists.</p> <p>Russia has poured thousands of troops into the region, attacking from three sides in an attempt to encircle Ukrainian forces holding out in Sievierodonetsk and its twin, Lysychansk. Their fall would leave the whole of Luhansk province under Russian control, a key Kremlin war aim.</p> <p>“The occupiers shelled more than 40 towns in Donetsk and Luhansk region, destroying or damaging 47 civilian sites, including 38 homes and a school. As a result of this shelling five civilians died and 12 were wounded,” the joint task force of Ukraine’s armed forces said on Facebook.</p> <p>The statement said 10 enemy attacks were repelled, four tanks and four drones destroyed, and 62 “enemy soldiers” were killed.</p> <p>Gaiday said police in Lysychansk were collecting bodies of people killed in order to bury them in mass graves. About 150 people have been buried in a mass grave in one Lysychansk district, he added.</p> <p>Families of people buried in mass graves will be able to carry out a reburial after the war, and police are issuing documents enabling Ukrainians to secure death certificates for loved ones, Gaiday said.</p> <p>Zelenskiy said in his nightly address on Wednesday that Russian troops “heavily outnumber us” in some parts of the east and echoed pleas from his foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba to the World Economic Forum in Davos for more weaponry from the west.</p> <p>“We need the help of our partners - above all, weapons for Ukraine. Full help, without exceptions, without limits, enough to win,” Zelenskiy said in his daily address to the nation.</p> <p>And he called out the international community for paying too much attention to Russia’s interests and too little to Ukraine’s.</p> <p>The Ukrainian president took specific aim at former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger and the New York Times for suggesting territorial sacrifices might be necessary to end the conflict.</p> <p>Kissinger, the 98-year-old champion of realpolitik, this week told World Economic Forum attendees in Davos that a return to the “status quo” before Russia’s February 24 invasion would be ideal. Russia had formally annexed Crimea in 2014, while separatist groups aligned with Moscow have long controlled the easternmost regions of Donetsk and Luhansk.</p>

Pushing Moscow to surrender that territory threatened to turn the conflict into a new, broader war, Kissinger warned, adding that negotiations needed to begin within two months.

“It seems Mr Kissinger’s calendar is not 2022, but 1938,” Zelensky responded, comparing his suggestion to the agreement that ceded part of Czechoslovakia to Nazi Germany more than 80 years ago.

UK foreign secretary Liz Truss is expected to call on Thursday for further military aid and sanctions to help Ukraine, during a trip to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

“Russia’s aggression cannot be appeased. It must be met with strength,” Truss is expected to say, noting concessions made to Putin before operations were launched in Georgia, the Crimea and Donbas.

Russia’s invasion of its pro-western neighbour has caused global shockwaves, with the latest being fears of food shortages, particularly in Africa.

Moscow blamed the international sanctions imposed after the invasion, while the west says the shortage is mainly down to Russia’s blockade of Ukrainian ports.

“Solving the food problem requires a comprehensive approach, including the removal of sanctions that have been imposed on Russian exports and financial transactions,” said Russian deputy foreign minister Andrey Rudenko.

But Kuleba urged delegates at Davos in Switzerland not to give in. “This is clear blackmail. You could not find a better example of blackmail in international relations,” Kuleba told the WEF in Davos. Kuleba also slammed the western military alliance Nato for “doing literally nothing” to stop Russia.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 Russia mercenaries face war crimes trial
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/25/wagner-group-fighters-accused-murdering-civilians-ukraine-war-crimes-belarus
GIST	<p>Two alleged Wagner Group fighters from Belarus have been accused of murdering civilians near Kyiv, making them the first international mercenaries to face war crimes charges in Ukraine.</p> <p>Ukrainian prosecutors late on Tuesday released the names and photographs of eight men wanted for alleged war crimes – including murder and torture – in the village of Motyzhyn. Several are believed to have fought in Syria.</p> <p>They say five are Russian soldiers, one is a Russian mercenary with the Wagner Group and the final two are Belarusian mercenaries.</p> <p>The Guardian has previously reported on the alleged involvement of the soldiers named by prosecutors on Tuesday in the systematic torture and murder of civilians in Ukraine including the head of the village council and her husband and son.</p> <p>There have been reports of Wagner fighters on the ground in Ukraine, but these are the first charges against allegedly serving mercenaries, and the first non-Russians charged.</p> <p>Established in 2014 to support pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine, Wagner is allegedly funded by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a powerful businessman who is closely linked to Vladimir Putin and has faced western sanctions.</p> <p>Russia has used paid fighters to bolster its forces since the start of the war. It was estimated to have deployed between 10,000 and 20,000 mercenaries from Syria, Libya and elsewhere, including Wagner Group fighters, in its offensive in Ukraine’s Donbas region, a European official said last month.</p>

A survivor had previously described to the Guardian how Russian soldiers who were perpetrating a sadistic killing spree lasting days in the village had described Ukraine as a “fairytale” compared with Syria.

Prosecutors said Sergey Vladimirovich Sazanov 51, born in the town of Rechitsa in Belarus, was one of about 300 Wagner mercenaries who participated in a February 2018 offensive in the Syrian province of Deir ez-Zor. They cited the open source research group InformNapalm.

Another man, Alexander Alexandrovich Stupnitsky, 32, a native of Orsha in Belarus, was identified as a liaison officer for the assault platoon of the Wagner Group’s 1st reconnaissance and assault company.

The third man identified as a Wagner member, Sergey Sergeevich Sazonov, 33, was born in Kaliningrad and is allegedly the driver of the Wagner Group command vehicle.

Denis Korotkov, an expert on the Wagner Group, confirmed that two of the suspects had previously worked for the mercenary company. “Sazonov and Stupnitsky are in my files,” Korotkov told the Guardian. He said it was unusual for Belarusian citizens to fight with the group, because they could face jail sentences for it.

“It is likely that Sazonov and Stupnitsky fought in Syria,” he added. “They don’t have a particular reputation, just regular Wagner soldiers.”

None of the accused men are in custody, and prosecutors believe they may since have been relocated to frontline positions in the Donbas, where Putin has positioned most of his armed forces following their retreat from the area around Kyiv.

“There is a possibility that these men are still fighting in Ukraine, or that they will be killed during the fighting,” said Oleh Tkalenko, a senior prosecutor in the Kyiv region. “We are still working on it and we will do everything possible to arrest them.”

Tkalenko said the investigation was based on photographic evidence, CCTV footage and reports of hundreds of survivors who confirmed the identities of their torturers.

Only three men survived the torture camp in Motyzhyn.

After killing the civilians, the soldiers buried them in mass graves around the camp. In one, investigators found the corpse of Olga Petrivna, the head of the village council of Motyzhyn, together with her husband and son. Petrivna had chosen to stay in the town and coordinate aid and territorial defence when the Russians arrived.

Tkalenko said that Ukrainian authorities had so far identified more than 5,000 Russian soldiers who were deployed north of Kyiv. “We are keeping records of all prisoners of war, and we know which ones committed war crimes.”

The list of alleged war criminals includes 15 other Russian soldiers charged with human rights abuses during the brutal month-long occupation of towns north of Kyiv.

Anna Neistat of the Clooney Foundation for Justice said Ukraine’s general prosecutor’s office had signalled that it wanted to lead the overall effort while showing a willingness to accept help from the international community.

“They are very active. To date they’ve opened 11,000 cases,” said Neistat. “For the first time in decades, in a conflict situation, we have a national prosecutor who is able to lead these investigations and it’s absolutely right” that Ukraine has made seeking justice for atrocities committed by Russian troops a

	<p>priority and national prosecutors are risking their lives to collect evidence of war crimes even in areas still threatened by enemy forces or laced with mines.</p> <p>“Having said that, there is a danger of the prosecutors are getting overwhelmed because it’s huge number of cases,” said Neistat, who noted that instead of obstructing parallel investigations, the prosecutor’s office had been open to international support and was active in coordinating parallel investigations being launched elsewhere.</p> <p>There has been unprecedented interest in building cases by foreign prosecutors and NGOs over the crimes committed in Ukraine. More than a dozen national prosecutors outside of Ukraine have opened cases into war crimes or crimes of aggression. The international criminal court opened its investigation just four days after the invasion. On Monday, a court in Kyiv sentenced a Russian soldier to life in prison for the killing of a Ukrainian civilian, in the first verdict in a trial related to war crimes carried out by the Russian army during its invasion of Ukraine.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/25 Outbreaks Pierce Co. childcare facilities up
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/tacoma-pierce-county-health-dept-reports-91-cases-of-covid-at-23-childcare-facilities
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. - In the last month, COVID outbreaks at businesses and childcare facilities have more than doubled in Pierce County, according to the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department (TPCHD).</p> <p>TPCHD defines an outbreak as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 cases within 14 days of each other • Plausible link to the business between the cases <p>According to TPCHD, cases related to outbreaks nearly doubled as well.</p> <p>This week, the health department reported 91 cases of COVID at 23 childcare facilities in the county. Cadence Academy Preschool Dupont reported 15 cases active in the outbreak, according to the health department.</p> <p>The TPCHD says it removes outbreaks from its list after 28 days if the organization does not have any new cases associated with the current outbreak.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/23 Sedro-Woolley steps up school security
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/sedro-woolley-stepping-up-police-presence-at-area-schools-following-texas-school-shooting
GIST	<p>SEDRO-WOOLLEY, Wash. - Police in Sedro-Woolley are stepping up their presence in area schools, just a day after a mass shooting at an elementary school in Texas.</p> <p>Mary Purcell Elementary School shared a photo of a Sedro-Wolley police officer with three grade school students.</p> <p>"Officer Humberg, one of Sedro Woolley’s finest, popped by for a visit this morning," wrote a school spokesperson in a Facebook post. "We are thankful for their continued efforts in making such strong connections with our students."</p> <p>The police department shared the image, saying there will be ‘an increased presence’ at local schools in the coming weeks. Officials say they want to do everything they can to help students feel safe.</p> <p>This comes in the wake of a devastating mass shooting at a Uvalde, Texas elementary school on Tuesday. As of publication, 19 children and two teachers have been confirmed killed in the shooting.</p>

Washington Superintendent Chris Reykdal issued a statement Wednesday morning to educators, saying: "Washington educators, I know these are the toughest mornings. I want to take this moment to name you - the educators of our children. We see you, we love you, and we know you support our children way beyond learning standards. You don't have to be strong today, just be you."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 School shooting rattles rural Texas town
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/05/25/us/shooting-robb-elementary-uvalde
GIST	<p>UVALDE, Texas — The gunman who killed 19 children and two teachers in a rural Texas elementary school on Tuesday entered the building despite being confronted by an armed school security officer, then wounded two responding police officers and engaged in a standoff inside the school for over an hour, state police officials said.</p> <p>While gaps remained in the timeline of events, details emerged on Wednesday of a protracted scene of carnage at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde. What began around 11:30 a.m., with the first report of an armed man approaching the school, ended as specialized officers breached a pair of adjoining classrooms and killed the gunman barricaded inside just after 1 p.m., state police officials said.</p> <p>It was not known how many were killed in the first minutes of the massacre, which was the deadliest in an American school since 20 children and six educators were shot to death at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., in 2012. But officials said that the officers had successfully contained the gunman, identified as Salvador Ramos, until more specially trained officers could arrive.</p> <p>Yet even as the details of the attack became more clear, the motivation behind the eruption of violence remained frustratingly opaque. In the absence of an explanation, there was only deep grief in a community unaccustomed to outside attention, and a raw renewal of the national debate over firearms legislation and the stupefying tally of gun violence in America.</p> <p>By Wednesday, all of the victims had been identified by the officials, who had yet to release their names, but the toll of the tragedy was only beginning to take shape.</p> <p>All 21 fatalities occurred in a single area of the school, the authorities said. They included Eva Mireles, a teacher who ran marathons in her free time, and Jailah Silguero, 10, the youngest of four children. "I can't believe this happened to my daughter," said her father, Jacob Silguero, crying during an interview. "It's always been a fear of mine to lose a kid."</p> <p>President Biden said he would travel to Uvalde in the coming days to try to comfort the residents. He did not call on Congress to take up gun safety legislation but in remarks on Wednesday said that the "Second Amendment is not absolute" and that previous gun safety laws did not violate its constitutional protections. "These actions we've taken before, they save lives," he said. "They can do it again."</p> <p>Still, with little apparent opening at the federal level, states controlled by Democrats moved to introduce their own changes. In New York, Gov. Kathy Hochul said she would work to raise to 21 — "at a minimum" — the age for buying AR-15-style weapons like the one the Texas gunman used. In California, the State Senate advanced a bill along party lines, proposed by Gov. Gavin Newsom and modeled on Texas' restrictive abortion law, that would let private citizens sue those who make or sell outlawed ghost guns, ghost gun kits and assault-style weapons.</p> <p>"This state is leaning in," Mr. Newsom said. "We're leaning forward."</p> <p>In Uvalde, top Texas officials gathered for an emotional news conference that began with calls for unity in the aftermath of the killing. "It is intolerable and unacceptable to have in this state anybody who would kill little kids in our schools," said Gov. Greg Abbott, who has celebrated the loosening of gun regulations in Texas and pushed for a new law last year that allows most Texans to carry a gun without a permit.</p>

But the somber tone that Mr. Abbott sought to strike was upended by Beto O'Rourke, the Democrat challenging Mr. Abbott's re-election, who blamed the governor for the repeated carnage in the state. "The time to stop the next shooting is right now and you are doing nothing," Mr. O'Rourke said.

"Sit down, you're out of line and an embarrassment," the lieutenant governor, Dan Patrick, responded.

The interruption and resulting vitriol from the stage, filled almost entirely with Republican officials, revealed in an instant the entrenched battle lines over gun ownership and mass killing in the United States.

"I hate to say this but there are more people who are shot every weekend in Chicago than there are in schools in Texas," Mr. Abbott said later. He criticized "people who think that, well, 'Maybe we just implement tougher gun laws — it's going to solve it,'" saying that "Chicago and L.A. and New York disprove that thesis."

Gov. J.B. Pritzker of Illinois responded later by pointing to evidence that "the majority of guns used in Chicago shootings come from states with lax gun laws."

Mr. Patrick said limiting entrances to just one at smaller schools could be a solution to keeping students safe. He also suggested arming teachers. Mr. Abbott stressed the need for better mental health care, though he did not propose how to improve access to it in the state.

Yet in the case of Mr. Ramos, there was little to raise official alarm ahead of the shooting, officials said. No history of mental illness. No apparent criminal record. "We don't see a motive or catalyst right now," said Steven McCraw, the director of the Texas Department of Public Safety.

But those who knew the gunman said he had been slipping away: He appeared to have dropped out of high school and often frightened co-workers at a fast-food restaurant where he worked. When picked on, he would lash out in response. Acquaintances said he frequently missed class and had few friends.

"He would curse at the customers, at the managers, even at me," said Jocelyn Rodriguez, 19, an employee at the Wendy's restaurant. She recalled that he once told her, "I'm going to shoot up the Wendy's," but she never took his threats seriously. "I thought he was joking."

Two weeks ago, she said, he stopped showing up to work.

He purchased an AR-style rifle at a local retailer on May 17, a day after his 18th birthday. Then he bought another one on May 20, officials said. In between, he bought 375 rounds of ammunition.

He had been [messaging obliquely about his plans](#) with a 15-year-old girl in Germany who he had recently met online. The girl, who asked to be identified only by her nickname, Cece, said he had video-called her in the days around his birthday from a gun store, where he told her he was buying a rifle. Mr. Ramos also showed her, on the video call, a black bag that appeared to hold many magazines of ammunition and at least one gun.

On Tuesday morning, parents dropped their children off at Robb Elementary, a cheerful brick schoolhouse near the edge of Uvalde where everyone was preparing for summer break.

Narcedalia Luna and her 8-year-old grandson, a third grader, attended an end-of-the-year awards program in the school's cafeteria. But her grandson told her that he wanted to go home early. So they did. "I gave in and I'm glad I did," she said.

They returned to their home on Diaz Street.

Along that same short street, less than half a mile from the school, Mr. Ramos lived in a modest home with his grandmother. On Tuesday morning, Mr. Ramos texted the girl in Germany just after 11 a.m., apparently annoyed that his grandmother was calling AT&T about his cellphone. “Ima do something to her rn,” he wrote. The screenshots do not show Cece replying, but at 11:21 a.m., Mr. Ramos sent another text: “I just shot my grandma in her head,” followed immediately by another: “Ima go shoot up a elementary school rn.”

Mr. Ramos, officials said, had picked up one of the weapons he had bought, and shot his 66-year-old grandmother in the face.

The injured woman rushed to a neighbor’s house for help while Mr. Ramos sped off in her pickup truck, bringing with him a bag of ammunition and the two weapons. Ms. Luna said another neighbor spotted the grandmother with “blood on her face running across the street.”

The truck Mr. Ramos was driving, officials said, crashed at high speed next to the school at roughly 11:30 a.m.

As he approached the school, officials said, he encountered an Uvalde school district officer. There were conflicting reports, state police officials said, as to whether there was an exchange of gunfire at that point.

As the gunman approached, Juan Paulo Ybarra Jr. said, his little sister, a 10-year-old student at Robb Elementary, had been inside her fourth-grade class, watching a movie. He said she looked out of the classroom window and saw a man outside with a gun, then alerted her teacher. Soon the classroom could hear gunfire aimed toward nearby windows, she told him.

Mr. Ybarra said his sister described how she and her fellow classmates jumped out of the window, one by one, and ran to a funeral home across the street, seeking refuge.

The gunman entered the school. After he was inside, two officers from the Uvalde Police Department arrived, engaged the gunman and were immediately met with gunfire, officials said. Both were shot.

Soon, scores of police officers responded to the scene, but the gunman had barricaded himself inside what Mr. Abbott described as internally connected classrooms. It would take a tactical team, including specialized Border Patrol agents, to finally breach the room.

As they entered, one of the agents held up a shield so the other agents could file in behind, an official briefed on the investigation said. Three of the agents fired their weapons once they were in the room, striking the gunman several times and killing him shortly after 1 p.m.

In Uvalde, which lies in a rural area near the Mexican border dotted with desert willows and bigtooth maples, there are so few places to host large events that the governor’s news conference took place in the same high school the gunman had attended.

Classes were supposed to let out on Thursday for the summer. Instead the year ended early as parents were faced with the unthinkable, waiting for hours on Tuesday for the dreaded confirmation about the fate of their children, some having provided DNA swabs to prove their relationship.

“They were beautiful, innocent children,” said George Rodriguez, who had ties to two children killed in a shooting: a niece and a 10-year-old boy, Jose Flores, who he said had been like a grandson. Mr. Rodriguez said a counseling session at the local civic center had offered little relief from the pain of losing the boy whose photo he kept in his wallet, “my little Josécito.”

[Return to Top](#)

SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/05/25/world/covid-19-mandates-vaccine-cases#china-pushes-for-regular-mass-testing-in-zero-covid-pursuit
GIST	<p>Chinese cities and provinces have turned to regular mass coronavirus testing, even in the absence of a local Covid-19 outbreak, raising concerns about the economic toll.</p> <p>The 99 million residents of central Henan Province will be required to take P.C.R. tests every other day by June. In the eastern province of Zhejiang, drivers are tested at highway exits before they can enter. Beijing, which has a small outbreak, is among the cities now requiring a test to get on the subway or enter any public place.</p> <p>The “zero Covid” approach to contain the highly infectious Omicron variant risks increasing economic stress and further irking a population that has been protesting the country’s strict lockdowns. Even so, officials are sticking with it. The strategy has appeared repeatedly in official announcements and state media in recent weeks.</p> <p>In early May, Sun Chunlan, a Chinese vice premier, said residents of large cities should be able to get P.C.R. tests within a 15-minute walk of their homes. By mid-May, nearly 10,000 booths had been set up across Shanghai. But not all local governments can afford to do what China’s wealthiest city does.</p> <p>Regular mass testing in China’s larger and more developed cities, which would comprise around 500 million people, could cost over 1.7 trillion yuan, or \$255 billion, a year, equal to about 1.5 percent of the country’s gross domestic product in 2021, according to an estimate by Soochow Securities economists in early May. The report spread through Chinese social media and was later censored.</p> <p>A health official said testing would not need to be as extensive everywhere.</p> <p>The testing should be focused on provincial capitals that are at high risk of importing infections and in cities with a population of at least 10 million, Guo Yanhong, a National Health Commission official, said at a Monday news briefing. Testing frequency should depend on the local situation, she said.</p> <p>Still, five provinces and numerous cities aside from major metropolises like Shanghai and Beijing have said they are exploring regular P.C.R. testing and other measures.</p> <p>In less affluent central provinces, strict containment and prevention measures have already taken a toll. Local governments in Sichuan and Anhui have called in recent weeks for public donations to alleviate strains in supplies of medical equipment.</p> <p>On social media, there has been no shortage of mockery of the new efforts. On Weibo, China’s Twitter-like platform, many users suggested that coronavirus testing could juice economic growth, which has dropped under lockdowns and travel bans.</p> <p>In response, Hu Xijin, a former editor of the Communist Party tabloid Global Times, praised Henan’s testing plan on Monday. He also repeated the official line that living with the virus would never work in China and that regular P.C.R. testing was the country’s best option.</p> <p>“Please be polite and stop slandering nucleic acid tests by splashing dirty water,” Mr. Hu said.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/25 Schools, colleges reimpose mask mandate
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/05/25/world/covid-19-mandates-vaccine-cases#masks-hawaii-delaware
GIST	As coronavirus cases have increased across the United States, some universities and public school systems have reimposed indoor mask mandates on their campuses, a sign that while the academic year may be coming to a close, the pandemic is still not.

The University of Hawaii's mandate was expanded [Wednesday](#) on its 10 campuses, requiring masks in all indoor spaces except when working alone or where social distancing is possible. The university said it took the action because nearly the whole state was now in the high-risk category for community transmission [under Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance](#).

The University of Delaware cited rising new-case reports and hospitalizations both [in its home state](#) and across the nation when it announced its mask mandate [would once again include all indoor spaces](#), effective Tuesday. President Biden, an alumnus, is scheduled to give a commencement address at the university [on Saturday](#).

Some public school systems have taken similar steps this week to reintroduce universal indoor masking, including two in Rhode Island, in [Providence](#) and [Central Falls](#). Both are in a county that was recently classified as high risk, officials from each system said.

The schools in [Philadelphia](#) restored their mask mandate on Monday. When city officials there tried to do the same for other indoor public settings in April, they [reversed course after four days](#).

Another Omicron subvariant, known as BA.2.12.1, which spreads more rapidly than previous versions, has become the [dominant form of the virus](#) among new U.S. cases, according to federal estimates. For the first time since February, the country is now averaging more than 100,000 new confirmed cases a day, [according to a New York Times database](#), and the widening use of at-home testing means the true number of infections is probably higher.

[Federal health officials have warned](#) that [a large share of Americans were living in areas](#) with medium or high levels of virus transmission. The White House's Covid-19 coordinator, Dr. Ashish K. Jha, is also urging Americans to mask up. "I feel that very strongly, that in crowded indoor spaces, in places with high transmission, people should be doing that," Dr. Jha said Sunday on the ABC program "This Week."

Still, conditions appear to be stabilizing in some Northeastern states that were among the first to see a spring surge in cases. Though still high, case rates have started to level off or decline in [New Jersey](#), [New York](#) and [Rhode Island](#).

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 College enrollment crisis deepens
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/26/us/college-enrollment.html
GIST	<p>The ongoing enrollment crisis at U.S. colleges and universities deepened in spring 2022, raising concerns that a fundamental shift is taking place in attitudes toward the value of a college degree — even as the coronavirus pandemic has disrupted operations for higher education.</p> <p>The latest college enrollment figures released on Thursday by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center indicated that 662,000 fewer students enrolled in undergraduate programs in spring 2022 than a year earlier, a decline of 4.7 percent. Graduate and professional student enrollment, which had been a bright spot during the pandemic, also declined 1 percent from last year.</p> <p>Doug Shapiro, the center's executive director, noted small gains in first-year, first-time students. However, he suggested that the numbers and the breadth of the declines indicate an underlying change, as students question whether college is the ticket to the middle class and a good-paying job.</p> <p>"That suggests it's more than just the pandemic to me; it's more than just low-income communities that are primarily served by community colleges," Dr. Shapiro said during a conference call with reporters. "It suggests that there's a broader question about the value of college and particularly concerns about student debt and paying for college and potential labor market returns."</p>

Prospective college students may be weighing the relative value of jobs that require or expect a college degree against equally attractive opportunities that do not, he said.

Overall, total undergraduate enrollment has dropped by nearly 1.4 million — or 9.4 percent — during the pandemic. When the pandemic emerged in spring 2020, many colleges moved to online instruction, and some students did not report to campus at all, changes that considerably altered the traditional college experience.

Even before the pandemic, though, college enrollment had been dropping nationally, with institutions of higher learning buffeted by demographic changes, as the number of college-age students leveled off, as well as questions about student debt. A highly polarizing immigration debate also drove away international students.

While elite colleges and universities have continued to attract an overflow of applicants, the pandemic has been devastating for many public universities, particularly community colleges, which serve many low- and moderate-income students.

Declines occurred generally across the country but were slightly more pronounced in the Midwest and Northeast.

[In a report this week](#), officials in Tennessee said that the percentage of public high school graduates who enrolled in college immediately after high school had dropped from 63.8 percent in 2017 to 52.8 percent in 2021.

Overall, enrollment at public colleges and universities declined by more than 604,000 students in spring 2022, or 5 percent. Within the public sector, community colleges dropped the most, losing 351,000 students or 7.8 percent.

All told, community colleges around the country have lost 827,000 students since the pandemic began in spring 2020, according to the figures released by the research center. It collects and analyzes data from more than 3,600 postsecondary institutions for industry use.

In what Dr. Shapiro called possible signs of a “nascent recovery,” first-time, first-year enrollment increased in spring 2022 by 13,700 students, or 4.2 percent, over last spring.

“It really remains to be seen whether this will translate into a larger freshman recovery in the fall,” Dr. Shapiro said.

The increase did not extend to Black students, according to a special demographic analysis by the clearinghouse, which found that Black freshman enrollment declined by 6.5 percent, or 2,600 students. In total, there were 8,400 fewer Black freshmen than in 2020.

In releasing its figures, Tennessee’s higher education commission also cited what it called “notable disparities” between Black and Hispanic students and white students.

Overall, Dr. Shapiro said the numbers were discouraging, steeper than what the organization reported for the fall term.

“I thought we would start to see some of the declines begin to shrink a bit this term,” he said. “I am surprised that it seems to be getting worse.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Weary Europe fatalism toward monkeypox
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/25/world/europe/monkeypox-stigma.html

LONDON — With the cost of living soaring, a devastating war in Ukraine and the coronavirus still circulating, many Europeans had already been feeling anxious and drained.

Then came some more unwelcome news: Monkeypox, a rare viral illness that causes pus-filled rashes, had appeared in more than a dozen countries in the region.

“My first reaction was: Another plague coming to us? What’s next?” said Adrián Sanjosé, 38, from Spain, as he sat at Rome’s Fiumicino airport waiting to fly to his home in London. “We have a pandemic, a war, what else?”

But for some people, with a threshold for worry already tested by the coronavirus, initial bewilderment about a disease few had heard of before its reported appearance in Europe this month quickly faded into a sense of weary fatalism.

“I’m trying to be positive and not think about it,” Sourena Naji, a 27-year-old bartender in east London, said on Tuesday. “I was like: Not again.”

Health experts say monkeypox is unlikely to wreak the same kind of havoc as Covid, which has killed millions, infected more than half a billion people, and ravaged the world’s economy.

Human-to-human transmission of monkeypox, which is endemic to West and Central Africa and typically caught by coming into close contact with infected animals, is rare but happening through close physical contact, according to the World Health Organization. The symptoms include fever, a sore throat, coughing, fatigue, body aches and the distinctive rash.

Still, with more than 200 confirmed cases as of this week in Europe and dozens more suspected, health officials and organizations say they expect reports of the virus to rise and are working to contain its spread.

But while awareness about the impact of viral outbreaks on daily life has become heightened during the more than two years of the coronavirus pandemic, many people are finding it difficult to be overly concerned about the new virus — at least for now.

“We don’t want to believe it’s happening again,” said Maria Revilla, 34, a Spanish architect. “Maybe we are unconscious.”

As of Wednesday, Britain had reported 71 cases of monkeypox and another 133 were confirmed across the European Union, according to the data project Global.health. In the United States, officials had confirmed two cases and were evaluating six other patients.

“I don’t care for worrying much more at the moment,” said Tim Pearce, a business owner in London. “I’ll worry when there’s a few hundred cases.”

Though cases appear to be rising quickly, it is unclear whether that points to daily growth or the detection of a virus already in circulation for some weeks, said Professor Francois Balloux, director of the University College London Genetics Institute.

“It might eventually fizzle out, but there’s a chance it might not,” he said. “Whatever happens, it’s clear that it’s not a repeat of the Covid pandemic.” He added that nations already had stockpiles of smallpox vaccines, which have some side effects but are effective against the typically much milder monkeypox. “At this stage we definitely don’t expect a completely uncontrolled outbreak.”

The World Health Organization considers monkeypox to be endemic in a dozen African countries, and has recorded outbreaks since last year in Nigeria, Cameroon, Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo. “We obviously have a Western-centric view,” said Professor Balloux, of the clusters emerging in Europe.

Health authorities in Europe said that a high share of their cases had been reported among gay or bisexual men, and the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control recommended raising awareness “especially among men who have sex with other men that engage in casual sex, or who have multiple sexual partners.”

Alex Sparrowhawk, a representative for the Terrence Higgins Trust, a British charity that provides services relating to H.I.V. and sexual health, said the organization had received queries about the outbreak and was working to alert those who might be concerned and let them know they could seek care if needed. People on the whole were more attuned to how viruses functioned because of the coronavirus pandemic, he added.

“We’ve got an opportunity with this outbreak to put transmission under control and I think we have to seize that,” he said, but stressed the importance of avoiding any shaming.

On Sunday UNAIDS, the United Nations AIDS-fighting agency, said some of the coverage of monkeypox cases reinforced homophobic stereotypes, and urged the news media, governments, and communities to avoid stigmatizing particular groups of people, reiterating that the disease could affect anyone.

L.G.B.T.Q. associations around Europe have urged authorities to make clear the virus has nothing to do with one’s sexuality.

Linking a disease with a group “creates a stigma, which, if it becomes established, is very difficult to combat,” FELGTBI+, a Spanish nonprofit, wrote in a statement, adding that misinformation “on one hand stigmatizes vulnerable groups and, on the other, it generates a false sense of invulnerability in the rest of the population.”

Authorities are examining a Pride event in Spain’s Canary Islands and some other mass gatherings around Europe as potential sources of the virus’s spread. But health experts emphasize that transmission is likely to be linked to the size of crowds attending such events and not to the sexual orientation of the people attending them.

“It is completely accidental that this thing spread among men having sex with men,” Massimo Galli, a leading virologist in Milan, told Italian news media. “It is not a preference of the virus.”

Mr. Naji, the bartender, who identifies as gay and moved from Tehran to London seven months ago, said he hoped the spread of the virus did not encourage homophobia. “I was really looking forward to my first Pride, and I hope they don’t cancel it,” he said, of an event in Brighton in August.

Anjali Bourriaud, 21, a French student living in England, said she worried about misinformation surrounding the new outbreak given how recent it was, adding that she had heard the spread of monkeypox being likened to “a new AIDS crisis.”

“It is quite stressful to think a new virus is going around and the people its going to affect and the potential stigma they’re going to face,” she said.

But for some people going about lives with the experience of the coronavirus still high in their minds, a monkeypox outbreak does not seem worth stressing about.

“We have already done one pandemic — it can’t be much worse,” said Kathryn Brand, 21, an editorial assistant from London, adding that the fact that useful vaccines are already available reassured her. “If we have done it with Covid, we can do this again.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 Hotels ditch daily room cleaning
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Housekeepers-struggle-as-US-hotels-ditch-daily-17199766.php

HONOLULU (AP) — After guests checked out of a corner room at the Hilton Hawaiian Village resort on Waikiki beach, housekeeper Luz Espejo collected enough trash, some strewn under beds, to stuff seven large garbage bags.

She stripped the linens from the beds, wiped built-up dust off furniture and scrubbed away layers of grime on the toilet and bathtub. She even got on her hands and knees to pick confetti from the carpet that a heavy-duty vacuum failed to swallow up.

Like many other hotels across the United States, the Hilton Hawaiian Village has done away with daily housekeeping service, making what was already one of the toughest jobs in the hospitality industry even more grueling.

Industry insiders say the move away from daily cleaning, which gained traction during the pandemic, is driven by customer preferences. But others say it has more to do with profit and has allowed hotels to cut the number of housekeepers at a time when many of the mostly immigrant women who take those jobs are still reeling from lost work during coronavirus shutdowns.

Many housekeepers still employed say their hours have been cut and they are being asked to do far more work in that time.

“It’s a big change for us,” said Espejo, a 60-year-old originally from the Philippines who has cleaned rooms at the world’s largest Hilton for 18 years, minus about a year she was laid off during the pandemic. “We are so busy at work now. We cannot finish cleaning our rooms.”

Before the pandemic there were 670 housekeepers working at Espejo’s resort. More than two years later, 150 of them haven’t been hired back or are on-call status, spending each day from 5:30 a.m. to 10 a.m. waiting for a phone call saying there’s work for them. The number not hired back or on call stood at 300 just a few weeks ago.

“This is all about more money in the owners’ pocket by putting a greater workload on the frontline workers and eliminating jobs,” said D. Taylor, president of UNITE HERE, a union representing hotel workers.

While some hotels started experimenting with less frequent cleaning in the name of sustainability, it became far more widespread early in the pandemic, when to promote social distancing and other safety protocols, many hotels switched to offering room cleaning only if a guest requested, and sometimes only after staying a certain number of days. Guests were instructed to leave trash outside their door and call the front desk for clean towels.

But even as safety restrictions fade and demand picks up as the country enters peak travel season, many hotels are keeping their new cleaning policies in place.

A spokesperson for the Hilton Hawaiian Village said no Hilton representative was available for an interview about such policies at any Hilton property. Representatives for several major hotel chains, including Marriott and Caesars Entertainment, either declined to be interviewed or didn’t respond to Associated Press requests for comment.

Chip Rogers, president and CEO of the American Hotel & Lodging Association, a trade group whose members include hotel brands, owners and management companies, said it was the demands of guests — not hotel profits — that guided decisions about pandemic housekeeper services.

“A lot of guests, to this day, don’t want people coming into their room during their stay,” he said. “To force something onto a guest that they don’t want is the antithesis of what it means to work in the hospitality industry.”

The pandemic changed the standard of most hotel guests wanting daily cleaning, he said, adding it's not yet clear if that will result in a permanent shift.

Housekeeping policies vary based on the type of hotel, Rogers said, with luxury hotels tending to provide daily housekeeping unless guests opt out.

Ben McLeod, of Bend, Oregon, and his family didn't request housekeeping during a four-night stay at the Westin Hapuna Beach Resort on Hawaii's Big Island in March.

"My wife and I just have never really understood why there would be daily housekeeping ... when that's not the case at home and it's wasteful," he said.

He said he expects his kids to tidy up after themselves.

"I'm a Type-A, so I get out of bed and I make my bed, so I don't need someone else to make my bed," he said.

Unionized hotel workers are trying get the message out that turning down daily room cleaning is hurting housekeepers and threatening jobs.

Martha Bonilla, who has spent 10 years working at the Caesars Atlantic City Hotel & Casino in New Jersey, said she wants guests to ask for daily cleaning, noting it makes her job less difficult. Even though hotels in New Jersey are required by law to offer daily cleaning, some guests still turn it down.

"When I come home from work now, the only thing I want to do is go to bed," said Bonilla, originally from the Dominican Republic and a single mother of a 6-year-old daughter. "I am physically exhausted."

It's not just partying guests like the ones who threw confetti around in Hawaii that leave behind filthy rooms, housekeepers say. Even with typical use, rooms left uncleaned for days become much harder to restore to the gleaming, pristine rooms guests expect when they check in.

Elvia Angulo, a housekeeper at the Oakland Marriott City Center for 17 years, is the main breadwinner in her family.

For the first year of the pandemic, she worked a day or two a month. She has regained her 40 hours a week, but with rooms no longer cleaned daily the number of people working each shift has been cut in half, from 25 to 12.

"Thank God I have seniority here so I now have my five days again, and my salary is the same," said Angulo, 54, who is from Mexico. "But the work really is now harder. If you don't clean a room for five days you have five days of scum in the bathrooms. It's scum over scum."

Many housekeepers still aren't getting enough hours to qualify for benefits.

Sonia Guevara, who has worked at a Seattle Hilton for seven years, used to really enjoy the benefits at her job. But since returning to work after being laid off for 18 months, she hasn't qualified for health insurance.

"At first I was thinking to get a new job, but I feel like I want to wait," she said. "I want to see if my hours change at the hotel."

She said there are few other job options with hours conducive for having two children in school.

Now politicians are picking up on the issue, including Hawaii state Rep. Sonny Ganaden, who represents Kalihi, a Honolulu neighborhood where many hotel workers live.

	<p>“Almost every time I talk to people at their doors, I meet someone who works in a hotel and then we talk about how they are overworked and what is happening and working conditions,” he said. “You’ve got a lot of first- and second-generation immigrant folks that are kind of left high and dry by these non-daily room cleaning requirements.”</p> <p>Ganaden is among the lawmakers who introduced a resolution requesting Hawaii hotels “immediately rehire or recall employees who were laid off or placed on leave” because of the pandemic.</p> <p>If that’s not enough, Ganaden said he would be open to more forceful measures like some other places have taken.</p> <p>Washington, D.C.’s city council in April passed emergency legislation requiring hotels in the district to service rooms daily unless guests opt-out.</p> <p>Amal Hligue, an immigrant from Morocco, hopes the rules mean more hours at the Washington Hilton where she has worked for 22 years. She needs them so her husband can get health insurance.</p> <p>“I hope he has this month because I worked last month,” she said.</p> <p>At 57 years old, she doesn’t want to find a new job. “I’m not young, you know,” she said. “I have to stay.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/25 Shootings up, states divided on gun control
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/States-divided-on-gun-controls-even-as-mass-17199756.php
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash. (AP) — Washington Gov. Jay Inslee was quick to react to this week’s carnage at a Texas elementary school, sending a tweet listing the gun control measures the Democratic-controlled state has taken. He finished with: “Your turn Congress.”</p> <p>But gun control measures are likely going nowhere in Congress, and they also have become increasingly scarce in most states. Aside from several Democratic-controlled states, the majority have taken no action on gun control in recent years or have moved aggressively to expand gun rights.</p> <p>That’s because they are either controlled politically by Republicans who oppose gun restrictions or are politically divided, leading to stalemate.</p> <p>“Here I am in a position where I can do something, I can introduce legislation, and yet to know that it almost certainly is not going to go anywhere is a feeling of helplessness,” said state Sen. Greg Leding, a Democrat in the GOP-controlled Arkansas Legislature. He has pushed unsuccessfully for red flag laws that would allow authorities to remove firearms from those determined to be a danger to themselves or others.</p> <p>After Tuesday’s massacre at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, that left 19 students and two teachers dead, Democratic governors and lawmakers across the country issued impassioned pleas for Congress and their own legislatures to pass gun restrictions. Republicans have mostly called for more efforts to address mental health and to shore up protections at schools, such as adding security guards.</p> <p>Among them is Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, who has repeatedly talked about mental health struggles among young people and said tougher gun laws in places like New York and California are ineffective. In Tennessee, GOP Rep. Jeremy Faison tweeted that the state needs to have security officers “in all of our schools,” but stopped short of promising to introduce legislation during next year’s legislative session: “Evil exists and we must protect the innocent from it,” Faison said.</p> <p>Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers has repeatedly clashed with the GOP-controlled Legislature over gun laws. He has called for passage of universal background checks and “red flag” laws, only to be ignored by Republicans. Earlier this year, the Democrat vetoed a Republican bill that would have allowed holders of</p>

concealed carry permits to have firearms in vehicles on school grounds and in churches located on the grounds of a private school.

“We cannot accept that gun violence just happens,” Evers said in a tweet. “We cannot accept that kids might go to school and never come home. We cannot accept the outright refusal of elected officials to act.”

On Wednesday, a day after the Texas shooting, legislative Democrats asked that the Wisconsin gun safety bills be taken up again, apparently to no avail. Republican Senate Majority Leader Devin LeMahieu and Assembly Speaker Robin Vos did not return messages seeking their response.

In Pennsylvania, an effort by Democratic lawmakers Wednesday in the GOP-controlled Legislature to ban owning, selling or making high-capacity, semi-automatic firearms failed, as House Republicans displayed their firm opposition to gun restrictions. The GOP-majority Legislature has rejected appeals by Democratic governors over the past two decades to tighten gun control laws, including taking steps such as expanding background checks or limiting the number of handgun purchases one person can make in a month.

The situation is similar in Michigan, which has a Democratic governor and Republican-controlled Legislature. On Wednesday, Democrats in the state Senate were thwarted in their efforts to advance a group of bills that would require gun owners to lock up their firearms and keep them away from minors.

“Every day we don’t take action, we are choosing guns over children,” said Democratic Sen. Rosemary Bayer, whose district includes a high school where a teen was charged in a shooting that killed four in November and whose parents are charged with involuntary manslaughter, accused of failing to lock up their gun. “Enough is enough. No more prayers, no more thoughts, no more inaction.”

Republican state Sen. Ken Horn responded by urging discussion about the other potential causes of gun violence.

“I would just point out that there are political solutions, but there are just as many spiritual solutions,” he said. “We don’t know what’s really happening in this world, what’s happening in this country, what’s happening to young men.”

Florida stands out as a Republican-controlled state that took action. The 2018 shooting at a high school in Parkland that left 14 students and three staff members dead prompted lawmakers there to pass a law with a red flag provision that lets law enforcement officers petition a court to have guns confiscated from a person considered a threat.

Democrats now want that expanded to allow family members or roommates to make the same request of the courts, but there has been little appetite among Republicans to amend the law. Instead, Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis said he wants lawmakers to allow people to carry handguns without a permit. The state currently requires a concealed weapons license.

While Republicans have supported red flag laws in some other states, most legislative action around gun control in recent years has been in states led by Democrats.

In Washington state, the governor earlier this year signed a package of bills related to firearm magazine limits, ghost guns and adding more locations where guns are prohibited, including ballot counting sites.

In California on Wednesday, Gov. Gavin Newsom and top Democratic legislative leaders vowed to fast-track gun legislation, identifying about a dozen bills they plan to pass this year. Newsom highlighted a bill that would let private citizens enforce a ban on assault weapons by filing lawsuits – similar to a law in Texas that bans most abortions through civil enforcement.

Oregon's Democratically controlled Legislature has passed bills that require background checks, prohibit guns on public school grounds, allow firearms to be taken from those who pose a risk and ensure safe

storage of firearms. On Wednesday, a group of six Democrats said more must be done after the mass shooting in Texas and the racially motivated massacre in Buffalo, New York. They pledged additional action next year.

“We ran for office to solve big problems and make life better for our constituents — and that includes taking on the gun lobby and politicians that place profits and political power over children’s lives,” they said in a joint statement.

But there are limits even in some Democratic-controlled states, underscoring the challenge of gaining consensus to combat the rising frequency of mass shootings in the U.S.

Rhode Island has passed restrictions in recent years that include measures to ban firearms from school grounds and close the “straw purchasing” loophole that had allowed people to buy guns for someone else. But bills that would ban high-capacity ammunition magazines and assault weapons have been bottled up in committee, in part because the overwhelmingly Democratic chamber includes many lawmakers who have opposed the measures, citing their support for the Second Amendment.

In Connecticut, gun violence legislation supported by both parties swiftly followed after 20 children and six staff members were shot and killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012. But additional gun control measures stalled this year in the Democratic-led General Assembly, in large part because of a short legislative session and threats by Republicans to hold up legislation through a filibuster.

Democratic Gov. Ned Lamont said Wednesday he’s uncertain whether he will call a special session on the bills. They would put limits on bulk purchases of firearms and require the registration of so-called ghost guns, untraceable firearms that can be assembled at home.

“I think it’s become an incredibly partisan argument right now in our society,” Lamont said. “It wasn’t that way, you know, 30, 40 years ago. So that is disturbing, even in a state like Connecticut, where after Sandy Hook we had strong bipartisan support.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 Yakima Co. okays large solar power farm
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/permit-approved-for-large-solar-power-farm-in-yakima-county/
GIST	<p>MOXEE, Wash. (AP) — Plentiful sunshine, a nudge from the state of Washington, and even a few sheep will help a large solar power farm in eastern Yakima County begin operation sometime in 2024.</p> <p>Yakima County Hearing Examiner Gary Cuillier has approved a conditional use permit for the Black Rock Solar Energy Project, a photovoltaic solar power facility to be located 20 miles east of Moxee on both sides of State Route 24, the Yakima Herald-Republic reported.</p> <p>The project will feature 264,000 solar panels spread over a 1,060-acre site north of the Rattlesnake Hills and roughly 8 miles south of the Columbia River as it flows into Benton County and past the former Hanford nuclear reactor site.</p> <p>Renewable energy developer BayWa.r.e, Solar Projects LLC, based in Irvine, Calif., hopes to begin construction in spring of 2023, said Brandon Reinhardt, director of development. Construction takes 16-18 months. The goal is to have the facility running by the end of 2024.</p> <p>Reinhardt said the Black Rock project will generate 94 megawatts, capable of powering nearly 20,000 homes annually in the region with clean, reliable solar energy. This will help the state of Washington reach its goal of having utilities produce 100% renewable or zero-carbon energy by 2045.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/25 CBO: high inflation persists into next year
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/us-policy/2022/05/25/cbo-inflation-projection-debt/

GIST

High inflation is expected to persist for the rest of the year, saddling Americans with higher costs as price hikes continue, the Congressional Budget Office said on Wednesday.

The nonpartisan budget office estimated that key measures of inflation will show signs of easing this year relative to last year, but will remain uncomfortably high as demand continues to outstrip supply, putting upward pressure on prices.

From the end of 2020 to the end of 2021, the consumer price index — one measure of inflation — grew by roughly 6.7 percent, the highest level in roughly four decades. The pace of that increase will come down, according to the CBO, but only to 4.7 percent — still far higher than policymakers want. Other measures of inflation cited by the budget office project that price hikes will remain roughly twice the Federal Reserve's intended target of 2 percent. Price increases won't fall back to targeted levels until 2024, the CBO said.

"There remains a significant gap between consumers' demand and businesses' ability to supply it," said Adam Ozimek, chief economist at the Economic Innovation Group. "People's desire to consume more goods than businesses can produce is leading to a rise in prices, and consumers are going to feel that in their pocketbooks."

The projections suggest the Biden administration could remain hemmed in by the politics of high inflation, which has hurt the president's approval rating, while also potentially defining this fall's midterm elections. But the CBO report offers some hope for the White House as well, indicating high growth and low unemployment this year.

The eventual easing of inflationary pressure is part of the budget office's broader predictions of a gradual restoration of more typical economic conditions after disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic, trillions of dollars in stimulus, and energy and food shocks after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The CBO projects the U.S. economy will grow at 3.1 percent in 2022 — faster than usual, but slower than the rapid 5.5 percent clip of 2021 — as some of the factors juicing demand begin to ebb. Unemployment is projected to remain low, at 3.8 percent this year and 3.5 percent next year.

Similarly, the federal budget deficit that exploded in 2020 and 2021 amid a huge surge in federal pandemic spending is set to moderate over the next several years. The CBO projects the federal deficit will shrink to \$1 trillion in 2021 and average \$1.6 trillion annually from 2023 to 2032. The federal deficit hit a record of roughly \$3 trillion in 2020.

In a news briefing, CBO officials said the economic projections were solidified by March 2 and incorporated some of the initial impact of the disruption caused by Russia's war in Ukraine. But officials acknowledged that the report does not reflect the likely full impact of the war on prices, as the invasion in particular appeared to put dramatic upward pressure on food and gas costs, and said inflation is likely higher than their report states. The CBO officials spoke on the condition of anonymity under the ground rules of the call.

The administration has tried to highlight the falling deficit, but voters have remained alarmed by rising prices. The persistent price hikes pose a major challenge both for President Biden and the Federal Reserve, which is weighing how to push interest rate hikes to crush higher prices without throwing the economy into recession.

"Other than maybe fuel and energy prices, I think we'll see a deceleration of inflation," said Larry Mishel, an economist at the Economic Policy Institute, a left-leaning think tank, in an interview before the report's release. "How much, how quickly and where it will be is hard to judge."

Federal revenue is projected to reach its highest level as a percentage of gross domestic product in more than two decades because of the strong economic recovery from the pandemic, according to the CBO. In the news briefing, CBO officials said strong incomes across the economy — though offset by high prices

— mean that tax revenue overall is being pushed up, though they said many factors are likely in play. Investors also appeared to pay more on their capital gains, amid a remarkable run-up in the stock market.

Although the deficit is expected to fall in the short term, the CBO estimates that the deficit over 10 years has increased from its last economic projections by roughly \$1.1 trillion. That is in part because the central bank's move to hike interest rates will push up the cost of borrowing, even though revenues will also be higher.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 Unionized Starbucks stores face hard work
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/unionized-starbucks-stores-face-hard-work-of-bargaining/
GIST	<p>It's become a common sight: jubilant Starbucks workers celebrating after successful votes to unionize at dozens of U.S. stores.</p> <p>But when the celebrations die down, a daunting hurdle remains: To win the changes they seek — like better pay and more reliable schedules — unionized stores must sit down with Starbucks and negotiate a contract.</p> <p>It's a painstaking process that can take years.</p> <p>“The meat is at the bargaining table,” said AJ Jones, Starbucks’ senior vice president of global communications and a former consultant to companies during labor negotiations.</p> <p>At least 85 of Starbucks’ 9,000 company-run U.S. stores — representing 7,444 workers — have voted to unionize since December, according to the National Labor Relations Board, and at least 10 stores have rejected the union. Many more elections are coming; at least 268 stores across the U.S. have petitioned the NLRB to hold union elections.</p> <p>The labor board says it has officially certified 64 of those 85 elections, which means Starbucks must begin bargaining with the union at those stores. So far, just three — two in Buffalo, New York, and one in Mesa, Arizona — have begun the process; many others are talking to Starbucks about dates to begin negotiating, according to Workers United, which represents the unionized stores.</p> <p>All this is happening amid tensions between Workers United and the Seattle coffee giant, which opposes unionization. Already, the NLRB has filed 56 complaints against Starbucks for various labor law violations, including firing workers for union activity. Starbucks has filed two complaints against the union, saying labor organizers harassed and intimidated workers at some stores.</p> <p>Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz, a longtime union foe, said during a corporate earnings call in May that the company respects the rights of Starbucks’ employees and will bargain where it’s required to. But he also insisted that employees don’t need a union to get the best-in-class wages and benefits Starbucks provides.</p> <p>“Sharing success through wins and benefits with our partners is among our core values, and has been for 50 years,” Schultz said.</p> <p>Schultz then announced \$200 million in new investments for non-union stores, including raises for veteran employees and more training time for new baristas. The company even promised one of the union’s priorities — credit card tipping — before the end of this year.</p> <p>Schultz said federal labor law prohibits the company from automatically sharing those investments with unionized stores. But labor experts say that’s a classic anti-union tactic, and Starbucks could easily offer the new benefits as part of the bargaining process.</p>

Joe Thompson, a Starbucks worker who recently helped organize successful union elections at two stores in Santa Cruz, California, said the announcement confused and upset workers — and, for many, underscored the need for a union.

“They’re literally threatening to improve the material conditions at non-union stores,” Thompson said. “But they can take those benefits away at any point. If we have our contract, they can’t take those things away.”

Even when workers do successfully organize, there’s no guarantee it will stick, as evidenced in 1987 when Starbucks employees voted to decertify the union that represented a handful of Seattle stores just two years after voting it in.

But this time, Starbucks labor organizers say they’re determined to see the process through.

Jaz Brisack, a Starbucks employee and labor organizer who is at the bargaining table in Buffalo, said more stores around the country would like to begin negotiating, but the company has been slow to start.

Starbucks said the delays aren’t intentional, and the company is simply following the process. Spokesman Reggie Borges said the union’s insistence on store-by-store union elections — instead of regional ones, as Starbucks requested — is one reason bargaining is limping along.

Labor experts say it’s common for employers to drag out the bargaining process in an effort to take the wind out of union campaigns.

In a 2009 study, Kate Bronfenbrenner, the director of labor education research at Cornell’s ILR School, found that fewer than half of unions obtained their first contract within a year of winning an election. Bronfenbrenner is in the process of updating those numbers, but says it appears little has changed.

Brisack said bargaining sessions, which began in January, are held via Zoom every two or three weeks, with Starbucks employees and a representative from the Workers United on one side and Starbucks staff — including district managers and regional leaders — and attorneys on the other.

Brisack said bargainers surveyed workers and are developing contract language based on their priorities. Among their proposals: “just cause” language that makes it harder to fire workers, annual cost of living pay increases, compensation for employees who do extra work when stores are understaffed and the ability to let customers add tips to credit card purchases.

If an agreement is reached, it will likely become a template for other stores, but with tweaks to reflect local needs. Drive-thru stores need different language, for example.

U.S. labor law doesn’t set a deadline for agreeing to a contract. In fact, it doesn’t even require that an agreement be reached. It only requires both parties to bargain in good faith.

“The overall approach with the law is to encourage the parties to reach an agreement that they both can live with,” said Risa Lieberwitz, a professor of labor and employment law at Cornell University and the academic director of the university’s Worker Institute.

If the two sides reach an impasse, they could call in a mediator or file charges of “bad faith” bargaining with the NLRB. But that process is time-consuming, and the legal penalties for “bad faith” bargaining are weak, Lieberwitz said. The NLRB may order the offender to change its tactics, for example, or require leaders to publicly admit they broke the law. There are no financial penalties.

The union does have the power to strike, which could pressure Starbucks into reaching an agreement, Lieberwitz said. But Starbucks might also successfully convince workers that the company functions best without a union.

	<p>That’s what happened at a Starbucks in Springfield, Virginia, where workers rejected unionization in a 10-8 vote in April. Labor organizer and barista Tim Swicord said his store is well run, and workers didn’t want to risk changing that.</p> <p>Swicord said he’s taking some time to listen to his colleagues and won’t try to hold another election anytime soon. But he still supports the union.</p> <p>“It’s a long road, but we are a piece of the puzzle,” Swicord said. “We’ll fit in somehow.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/25 Haunting question: is any schoolchild safe?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/25/nyregion/parents-school-shooting-risk.html
GIST	<p>NEW YORK — Late Tuesday night, Luz Belliard sat on the edge of her bed in upper Manhattan in the room she shares with her 9-year-old granddaughter, Victoria, and thought about what to say.</p> <p>Victoria, a third grader, was sitting on her own bed, which was covered in stuffed animals; she had already seen on the evening news that children her age had been killed in a mass shooting at a school in Texas.</p> <p>Now, Belliard had to consider just what she would tell Victoria on their walk to school the next morning: Listen to your teachers. Get down on the floor. Remember the drills you do in class.</p> <p>“She’s young, but she understands — sometimes too much,” Belliard said Wednesday outside Victoria’s school, Public School 4 Duke Ellington in Washington Heights. “To take your child to school and then come back to see them dead, it’s not fair. It should not be that way.”</p> <p>Victoria was standing at her grandmother’s side.</p> <p>“It’s sad that a lot of children died that way. Those children had a big life ahead of them,” the girl said. “When I hear that kind of stuff it makes me scared.”</p> <p>In New York and across the country Wednesday, children, parents and caregivers grappled with the aftermath of the deadly shooting in Uvalde, Texas, where an 18-year-old gunman killed 19 children and two teachers before being shot dead by authorities.</p> <p>They hugged their children a little tighter and lingered a little longer at drop-off. They could imagine too easily a gunman bursting into their own child’s classroom. And they were once again faced with a haunting question: Is there anywhere in America where schoolchildren can truly be safe?</p> <p>Some schools around the country took extra precautions in the wake of the shooting. Schools in Texas and Florida banned backpacks from buildings Wednesday. Officials in states including Georgia and Virginia sent extra officers to schools as a precaution. In New York City, home to the nation’s largest school system, officials are considering ways to tighten security, including locking school doors after children have arrived for the day.</p> <p>The shooting has cast a somber tone over the final days and weeks of the school year.</p> <p>“Sometimes I don’t know what to say publicly,” Deborah Gist, superintendent of schools in Tulsa, Oklahoma, wrote in a Facebook post. “I feel a huge responsibility to use the right words. How, though, do I express the horror, outrage, frustration, disappointment, pain, and fear that an event like the shooting in Uvalde brings? It is a parent’s, a teacher’s, a principal’s, and a superintendent’s worst nightmare.”</p> <p>In New Jersey Wednesday morning, Cindy Cucaz, 47, received a message from the principal at her daughter’s high school in Belleville that said the local police department would be at drop-off and dismissal.</p>

“Hoping this brings some comfort and relief to students, teachers, administrators and parents,” Cucaz, who works in medical billing in Manhattan, read from an email sent to the student body.

But Cucaz said it would do little to relieve her fear from the moment her daughter, Catalina, 17, left for school until she returned home in the afternoon.

“I send her off every day with prayers that she comes back in one piece. Because of how the world is,” Cucaz said. “I just pray that she comes home.”

In Buffalo, New York, not far from where a racist gunman killed 10 Black people at a supermarket less than two weeks ago, the shooting in Texas piled fear atop fear. Patricia Davis paused before she dropped off her 13-year-old son at school Wednesday morning.

Be careful, she told him. If anything happens, “just fall on the floor.”

As she drove away, she could not help wondering, “Am I going to see my son again?”

“All of it is senseless,” Davis said. “We’re not safe anywhere, it just makes you want to stay home and lock yourself up and not go out for anything.”

The Texas shooting also rekindled the long-smoldering grief around the devastating shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, a decade ago that left six staff members and 20 children dead, some as young as 6 years old.

Scarlett Lewis, whose 6-year-old son, Jesse, was killed in the Sandy Hook shootings, said learning about every mass shooting is “like a punch in the gut every single time” that reactivates the pain and grief.

“For me, it never gets easier,” Lewis said. “Especially because they’re all preventable. It’s so difficult to lose a child, and you always have that pain.”

In New York City, even with some of the strictest gun laws in the country, some parents said they were on high alert after the Texas shooting, the massacre in Buffalo, and a mass shooting in April, in which a gunman opened fire during rush hour in a crowded subway car in Brooklyn, shooting 10 people and injuring at least 13 more.

“The feelings are just everywhere at this point,” said Victor Quiñonez, whose 11-year-old daughter attends a school in Brooklyn. “It’s anger, it’s frustration, it’s sadness.”

“It’s just difficult because there’s absolutely a sense of vulnerability for everybody in this country, because you can’t control what people do,” he said.

For some New York City parents, the shooting in Texas added to the emotional toll that gun violence in neighborhoods already takes.

Maria Urena said a shooting outside her 11-year-old son’s school in Maspeth, a neighborhood in Queens, prompted a lockdown and an urgent message to parents. She could not reach her son, Chris, and a sickening panic set it in.

She later learned that an upperclassman had been shot outside the school by another teenager. When she hovered over her children that evening, they were the ones comforting her. “Mom, this is an everyday thing,” Urena recalled her 17-year-old daughter, Ashley, saying.

As the children left for school Wednesday morning, Urena said, fingering her gold necklace that says “Chris” and “Ashley” in script, she thought about Texas, and what if that morning’s goodbye was the last.

“Us moms in the morning, you don’t know what is the last thing you told your kid in the morning. You could have gotten upset with your kid — ‘don’t do this, don’t do that,’” she said.

“You don’t know, that could be the last thing you ever told your child.”

New York City students and teachers are trained regularly on how to behave during a mass shooting, but city officials pledged to explore ways to tighten security at city schools.

The city schools chancellor, David C. Banks, said the school system was considering locking building doors after children have arrived for the day.

“The buildings are still open, so if somebody meant to do harm, they would be stopped by a school safety officer,” Banks said, “but they are already in the building.”

He and Mayor Eric Adams said the city was also exploring technology to better detect guns being secreted into schools.

Parents have also struggled with how to reassure their children that it is safe to return to class.

In Buffalo, José Esquilin, 43, was sitting at his desk when his daughter, Avalynn, 7, came in with her eyes wide after watching news of the Texas school shooting on television in the living room.

““Is this here? Did this happen here? They killed the kids? Is this going to happen at my school?”” she asked, according to Esquilin. He explained to her that there were many schools across the country, and that these shootings were rare.

When she replied that the same thing had already happened in their neighborhood, Esquilin paused.

“As a parent, like, what can you say? It’s true. It’s hard dealing with this.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 Justice Dept. police reform unfolds slowly
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/05/24/biden-police-reform-justice/
GIST	<p>LOS ANGELES — Thirty years after four officers were acquitted in the beating of motorist Rodney King, Associate Attorney General Vanita Gupta arrived at Los Angeles police headquarters to make a pitch for police reform.</p> <p>King’s case spurred Congress to grant the Justice Department landmark powers to investigate police departments that show a pattern of misconduct. But Gupta was here to make an appeal, not a threat. In a nation of 18,000 police agencies, she said, the federal government can’t force broad change solely through enforcement or litigation. That can only come with collaboration.</p> <p>“Together,” she said, “we’re going to tackle the most pressing issues.”</p> <p>Gupta was urging police to seek help from a new Justice Department resource center. Her message highlighted the failures and limitations of the police reform movement over the past three decades.</p> <p>Despite federal probes of more than three dozen jurisdictions, police still fatally shoot about 1,000 civilians a year, a disproportionate number of them Black and many unarmed, according to data collected and analyzed by The Washington Post. The killings in 2020 of George Floyd in Minneapolis and Breonna Taylor in Louisville, in particular, were followed by widespread public outrage over police violence and the relative lack of consequences for many who commit it.</p> <p>The question is how to change that reality at a time when rising gun violence and deep political polarization have complicated the Biden administration’s push for greater police accountability — and</p>

after the collapse of legislation in Congress that would have banned chokeholds and no-knock warrants, prohibited racial profiling and eliminated qualified immunity for officers.

A big piece of the answer, Justice officials say, is convincing police to take ownership of the push for change.

A longtime civil rights lawyer, Gupta oversaw many of the Obama administration's "pattern or practice" investigations into systemic police misconduct — including in Ferguson, Mo., Baltimore and Chicago — while serving as the head of Justice's civil rights division from 2014 to 2017. Those probes led to court-mandated consent decrees that placed each jurisdiction on a detailed reform plan.

While the Trump administration essentially banned consent decrees — launching only one pattern-and-practice investigation in four years — Attorney General Merrick Garland has revived them since President Joe Biden took office, opening investigations into police agencies in Minneapolis, Louisville, Phoenix and Mount Vernon, N.Y., so far.

But Gupta cautions that policing won't fundamentally change if federal efforts are primarily "antagonistic." Police agencies, she said, must feel invested in their own success, and getting there requires "more than a single tool."

"Usually, pattern or practice is when there's systemwide breakdowns," Gupta said in an interview. "But there's a lot of police departments that are looking for guidance on best de-escalation policies and use of force. We've got to have a way to reach many more police departments."

The police resource center Gupta unveiled last month — called a "knowledge lab" — is supposed to do just that: compiling best practices, including data, reports, training programs and academic research, for broad distribution to police and the public. Gupta called it a "potential game changer."

Justice officials also have high hopes for a collaborative reform initiative developed by the Obama administration, shut down under Donald Trump and revamped once Democrats returned to the White House. Under that program, run by the office of Community Oriented Policing, police chiefs can voluntarily sign up for targeted help on specific issues, such as reducing gun violence or supporting officer wellness — or they can seek technical assistance with crisis management, use-of-force policies or a broad organizational reassessment.

Some police leaders expressed relief that the Justice Department has been less heavy-handed than they expected when Biden took office.

"I'm encouraged that this administration is trying to find a balance," Los Angeles Police Chief Michel Moore said. "They have a bully pulpit to influence through edict, but also through guidance and through financial incentives and through collaboration."

In a meeting with Gupta, Moore detailed his efforts to hire hundreds of officers at a time when police departments are struggling with severe staffing vacancies and low morale. Moore said his department is working with a police foundation on a two-year rent subsidy program for recruits to help offset the high costs of housing in Los Angeles.

Gupta suggested they follow up on the issue and indicated the Justice Department is interested in promoting effective initiatives. "This is a problem we're hearing about everywhere," she said.

Justice officials said it is too early to tell how many departments will sign up for the collaborative initiatives, and some community activists have expressed skepticism. A voluntary partnership Justice struck with the Baltimore police department in 2014 was derailed eight months later, when Freddie Gray, a Black man, was fatally injured in police custody. Federal investigators then opened a pattern or practice investigation, leading to a court-approved consent decree in 2017.

“I feel like nothing that we put on paper can change the culture of policing until the federal government calls for consequences for misconduct,” said Ray Kelly, executive director of the Citizens Policing Project, which advocates for police reform in Baltimore. “We can write whatever we want on paper; does that actually lead to police doing something different on the street? The point is, it’s voluntary.”

— — —

The Justice Department has significantly increased grant funding for police agencies, distributing \$750 million this year — much of which targets hiring — up from \$580 million in the final year of the Trump administration. Biden has proposed doubling funding for local police hiring in fiscal 2023. In his State of the Union address, he pointedly rejected the “defund the police” message pushed by Black Lives Matter.

Republicans, however, still accuse him of being soft on crime.

At a Senate Appropriations Committee hearing in April, Sen. John Neely Kennedy, R-La., pressed Garland on gang violence in Chicago, demanding that the attorney general vocalize support for stop-and-frisk strategies to “get guns off the street.”

Garland, who visited Chicago last summer to announce a new program to target gun trafficking, told Kennedy that the federal government’s role is to offer technical expertise and resources. Local leaders should determine policies, he said. “There’s no one solution that fits all.”

Jim Pasco, executive director of the National Fraternal Order of Police, said Justice leaders have occupied a middle ground in the law-enforcement debate, including helping to negotiate details of an executive order on policing that Biden is expected to unveil Wednesday — the second anniversary of Floyd’s death.

Pasco said Justice officials have been helpful in working with police groups and explaining their concerns to the White House, which has yet to produce a final version of the order. Gupta declined to comment on the negotiations.

“You’re actually seeing a lot being done, but you’re seeing it be done in a far more sophisticated way,” Pasco said. “My sense is that it’s not all about picking winners or losers, but about improving the relationship between the officers and the communities they serve — but not at the expense of public safety.”

At the same time, civil rights advocates have grown frustrated over the pace of reform. In March, the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights — where Gupta served as president from 2017 to 2021 — wrote that the Biden administration “has failed to deliver on its campaign promises to enact true accountability and transformative change.”

The report praised Garland for reinstating consent decrees and allowing some prisoners to remain on home confinement after the end of the coronavirus pandemic emergency. But it said the administration “must do much more to prioritize policies and agency changes that would end harms caused by the federal criminal-legal system.”

Advocates across the country have petitioned Justice to open more police investigations. Last fall, Roc Nation, the social justice group founded by entertainment mogul Jay-Z, published an open letter addressed to Gupta in major newspapers, pleading for a federal probe into the Kansas City, Kan., police department over decades of alleged misconduct by former detectives.

Justice officials said they review all requests and consider a host of factors, including media reports and public records, before making decisions.

Maurice Mitchell, national director of the Working Families Party, praised Justice officials for successfully prosecuting three former Minneapolis officers in February for violating George Floyd’s civil

rights. But he pointed to the lack of federal charges in the police killings of Taylor and of Ma'Khia Bryant, a 16-year-old Black girl in Columbus, Ohio, who was shot last year as she threatened to stab a housemate.

The sole officer charged by Kentucky state prosecutors in connection with Taylor's shooting was acquitted in March of endangering her neighbors.

At the request of Columbus officials, the Justice Department is conducting a review of the city's police policies. But that probe is being handled by the Office of Community Oriented Policing, which lacks litigation authority.

"Systemic problems require systemic solutions, and in that category, we knew it would take some time," Mitchell said. "But progress has moved at a glacial pace."

— — —

Garland views bolstering public trust in police as crucial to developing effective crime-fighting strategies, a lesson he says he learned while prosecuting violent drug crimes as an assistant U.S. attorney in Washington, D.C., in the early 1990s.

"You can't get witnesses to testify if they don't trust the police," Garland said. "We speak to police agencies constantly here ... because our whole model for protecting the community is partnership."

Wade Henderson, who served as interim president of the Leadership Conference until stepping down in April, said civil rights leaders remain supportive of Justice's efforts. After an internal policy review led by Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco, the department banned federal agents from using chokeholds in most cases and began requiring them to wear body cameras on preplanned operations, hoping to set an example for local police agencies.

Garland "acknowledged that his hope going forward is that they would be able to address some of the issues our report has identified," Henderson said. He added that "there is a recognition that Congress is a barrier to addressing many of those concerns."

Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke, who oversees the civil rights division, said the department has been strategic in weighing opportunities for pattern or practice investigations, which are resource-intensive and typically take up to 18 months to complete. She noted that investigators are probing departments that range in size from Phoenix, with 2,775 officers, to Mount Vernon, N.Y., with just 200 — suggesting the approach sends a message that no jurisdiction is outside the scope of federal scrutiny.

"I don't think we can ignore the moment," said Clarke, who previously served as head of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and, like Gupta, faced nearly unanimous opposition from Republicans over her nomination. "We are on the heels of some of the largest demonstrations and protests that we've seen in modern history. I understand the sense of urgency."

The federal investigations have had mixed results, taking years to complete and costing local jurisdictions millions of dollars in fees for federal monitors. Last fall, Garland announced new rules to cap costs and limit the length of the consent decrees, hoping to bolster public confidence.

"I always try to tamp down expectations," Gupta said. "At the press conferences, I say, 'Change doesn't happen overnight.' ... Ultimately, the work has to happen in local communities, and folks have to be committed for the long haul."

One example is the partnership formed by the Los Angeles police and civic activist Connie Rice, who helped represent Rodney King's family after his death. During Gupta's trip to Los Angeles, Rice described how she spent years suing the police in court before shifting strategies and pursuing projects with police leadership. Those efforts helped lead to the launch of the Community Safety Partnership in 2010, in which officers provided additional services to public housing residents as a way to build trust.

	<p>In an interview, Rice called the Justice Department’s efforts at collaboration “the art of the possible at a time when we’re not able to get anything done” in Congress.</p> <p>“This is about the hearts and minds of policing — and no court order can change that. It has to be done by cops,” Rice said. “We have to become partners with the people who have the cultural and professional and internal clout and influence to point the department in a different direction.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/25 Spokane public schools safety protocol
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/local/spokane-public-schools-safety-plan/293-31f4224a-2cfc-41d4-9e38-2179afb031eb
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — Spokane Public Schools (SPS) emailed parents on Wednesday morning, following the deadly school shooting in Uvalde, Texas.</p> <p>“It may have happened thousands of miles away, but we <i>all</i> feel the impact of violence that touches a school,” Superintendent Dr. Adam Swinyard wrote in a statement. “Our love and support extends to the families, students, and community of Uvalde, Texas.”</p> <p>SPS said that staff is available to talk with students if they have questions or need to process the tragedy. The district also shared a link to the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), which has a webpage dedicated to school violence resources. Help from NASP includes tips for parents and teachers to talk with their children about violence, school violence prevention, and bullying prevention among other topics.</p> <p>SPS also shared a link to its safety protocols. SPS said state law requires schools to conduct nine drills a year, that includes practice for shelter-in-place, lockdown, and evacuation.</p> <p>SPS said every school site has security cameras and a single point of entry. Here is more information provided by SPS:</p> <p>Parents, if there is an emergency at your child’s school, please help us by doing the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check the SPS homepage at spokaneschools.org, the SPS Facebook page or our Twitter feed. We will provide credible, accurate and useful information to the public as soon as possible. Expect to see our posts updated as necessary. We will also provide updates to local media, but be aware that emergency situations can change rapidly. Information received from sources other than the school administrator or SPS communications office may be inaccurate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In addition, we will use our Blackboard Messenger phone and text notification system to contact parents and guardians with updates and information in as timely a manner as possible. Please make sure your emergency contact information is always up to date at your child's school. • Do not call or go to the school.In an emergency, onsite staff are focused solely on getting everyone to a safe location. Showing up to the site can create unnecessary traffic, preventing emergency vehicles from responding quickly, and may also put you in danger. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If you get a call or text from your student, help him or her remain calm. Remind your student that school staff know what to do in an emergency situation, and will work to keep everyone safe. <p>Familiarize yourself with the terms used during emergency situations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure and Teach: Used to secure the building from a potential threat that is distanced from the building, such as when an unauthorized person is loitering on school grounds or when there is criminal activity in the neighborhood. Exterior doors are locked, but normal activities continue inside the building. • Lockdown: Used when there is a perceived danger inside the building or on campus. Doors are locked, windows are closed and locked, blinds are closed. People are directed to move away from windows and doors. Hallways are cleared of students and school staff.

- **Evacuation:** When students and staff are moved out of the building to a pre-designated safe location.
- **Shelter-in-place:** Used during severe weather or other environmental threats (e.g., air contamination due to a local fire) to keep people safe while remaining indoors.

Parents with questions about the SPS safety protocols can reach out to the district through its [Let's Talk Platform](#).

SPS also encourages anyone who has information about a threat that may impact a school or school program to report it. People can call 911 or the SPS Department of Campus Safety at (509) 354-5934.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 Latest Covid wave largely hidden from view
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/nations-latest-covid-19-wave-largely-hidden-view/story?id=84938594
GIST	<p>Current COVID-19 cases are just a fraction of what they were at the peak of the omicron wave.</p> <p>But many people in the country may be noticing what seems to be a flood of cases in their social circles.</p> <p>Health experts say this anecdotal evidence may not be simply coincidence, as the U.S. may be in a “hidden” wave — one much larger than reported data would suggest.</p> <p>“There's a lot of COVID out there. I see it in my social circles, in my kids' schools and in the hospital employee infection numbers,” Dr. Shira Doron, an infectious disease physician and hospital epidemiologist at Tufts Medical Center in Boston, told ABC News. “We are clearly in a wave.”</p> <p>Although it is clear that infection rates have been steadily rising in recent weeks to their highest reported level since mid-February, scientists acknowledge that it is difficult to know how high COVID-19 case and even hospitalization numbers truly are, given the likely “substantially” undercounting of infections.</p> <p>This is due in part to changes in data collection and reporting and the proliferation of at-home tests. Some state officials report that health departments and healthcare facilities have also ended traditional tracking of COVID-19 patients, which epidemiologists say make it more difficult to know how many patients are coming into hospitals in need of care.</p> <p>Last month, former FDA Commissioner Dr. Scott Gottlieb estimated that officials were likely only picking up “one in seven or one in eight” infections.</p> <p>And President Joe Biden’s new coronavirus response coordinator, Dr. Ashish Jha, acknowledged that there are “a lot of infections” last week, likely the result of highly infectious omicron subvariants spreading across the country.</p> <p>“We know that the number of infections is actually substantially higher than that. It's hard to know exactly how many but we know that a lot of people are getting diagnosed using home tests,” Jha explained.</p> <p>More than 100,000 Americans officially testing positive every day</p> <p>The nation's reported daily case average, which officials say consists largely of PCR tests, now stands at more than 100,000 new cases reported a day, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).</p> <p>In recent weeks, nearly every state in the country has reported an increase in COVID-19 infections and the number of virus-positive people who are admitted to the hospital.</p> <p>The Northeast remains the nation’s most notable known COVID-19 hotspot, though surges in some cities, like Boston, appear to be showing initial signs of slowing.</p>

Nationally, according to the CDC's community levels, more than 45% of Americans live in an area with a medium or high COVID-19 risk.

The high community level suggests there is a "high potential for healthcare system strain" and a "high level of severe disease," and thus, the CDC recommends that people wear a mask in public indoor settings, including schools.

Hospitalization numbers have been increasing in recent weeks, but not at a rate as significant as infections.

However, over the course of the spring and winter, hospitalization data, too, has become less accessible, leading some experts to suggest patient totals could also be undercounted.

Earlier this year, the Department of Health and Human Services ended the requirement for hospitals to report several key COVID-19 metrics, including a daily total of the number of COVID-19 deaths, the number of emergency department overflow and ventilated patients and information on critical staffing shortages.

Further, certain states have stopped outright reporting of statistics including hospital bed usage and availability, COVID-19 specific hospital metrics and ventilator use.

However, Doron said a possible significant surge in infections, without an overwhelming number of hospitalized COVID-19 patients, could be a promising sign.

"If cases are really a lot higher than what we are seeing, it means the ratio of hospitalizations to cases and deaths to cases is even lower than what we are seeing, and we are already seeing a 'decoupling' between cases and hospitalizations and deaths," Doron said, which could indicate the virus is moving closer to a form that Americans can live with.

Even so, Doron added, "at a population level, however, COVID poses more risk because there are so many cases, and hospitals are already so full with both COVID and non-COVID patients."

A shift away from traditional testing

In recent months, states from coast to coast, have moved to shutter public testing sites, with an abundance of rapid COVID-19 tests now available in pharmacies and through the federal government.

"While home testing has created broader population access to infection status and hopefully better access to treatment, it has also created a major blind spot in our public health surveillance efforts," John Brownstein, Ph.D., an epidemiologist at Boston Children's Hospital and an ABC News contributor, said. "The latest BA.2 surge was masked by the shift in testing behavior and likely delayed decisions on public health interventions."

The shift away from traditional COVID-19 testing has left some health experts worried about continued issues of access to adequate healthcare and preventative health tools, such as testing and antiviral treatments, to protect vulnerable communities.

According to ABC News' analysis last summer of pharmacy locations across the country, there are 150 counties where there is no pharmacy, and nearly 4.8 million people live in a county where there's only one pharmacy for every 10,000 residents or more.

"What concerns me even more is what might be happening in communities and among families with fewer resources. Public testing sites have closed, home tests are expensive at the drugstore, and navigating the system to order free tests or get tests reimbursed by insurance requires literacy and technology," Doron said.

Broader insights on infection through home testing and wastewater sampling will be critical in the future to fully understand the scope of surges and protect all Americans, Brownstein said.

Virus not disappearing in low-transmission counties

This winter, following the omicron surge, the CDC released a new risk level map, which shifted away from focusing on the level of transmission within a community, and rather shifted the attention to hospital capacity and admission levels.

The rollout of the new map, which aims to help people and local officials assess when to implement potential mitigation measures, caused controversy among some Americans, explained Doron. While some people argued the shift in metrics was long overdue and a sign of the times, others said the move was premature.

“Some people were happy because they felt that we were beyond the time period in which we needed to reimpose restrictions and mandates every time cases increased, given widespread population immunity from vaccination and infection,” Doron said. “It made other people angry because a transition to a medium or high-risk status now requires increases in hospitalizations, which are lagging indicators, in other words there can be a lot of cases before hospitals get full, and some people might choose to take extra precautions sooner.”

Brownstein noted that given the shift away from transmission rates, some Americans may not be fully aware of the continued dangers of the virus, as a green county is not necessarily indicative of the virus simply disappearing.

“While the CDC map reflects decreased risk of severe complications from COVID infection, it unfortunately hides places with high community transmission,” Brownstein said. “This masking of risk may provide a false sense of security especially to those at high risk of hospitalization and death.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Nationwide protests in wake Texas shooting
SOURCE	https://www.axios.com/2022/05/26/march-for-our-lives-texas-shooting
GIST	<p>March for Our Lives, the student-led gun control advocacy group, is planning nationwide protests in the wake of the Uvalde, Texas, school shooting, according to its website.</p> <p>Driving the news: The protests will take place some four years after the shooting at a high school in Parkland, Florida, during which a gunman killed 17 people. That shooting led to the group's founding and preceded the organization holding one of the largest demonstrations in U.S. history.</p> <p>Details: The organization is planning a march in D.C. for June 11, with other actions planned in cities around the country.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "In 2018 you marched with us to end gun violence. 4 years later, we're marching again," the organization wrote on Twitter.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/25 Long Covid affects more older adults
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/long-covid-affects-older-adults-shots-prevent-84970866
GIST	<p>New U.S. research on long COVID-19 provides fresh evidence that it can happen even after breakthrough infections in vaccinated people, and that older adults face higher risks for the long-term effects.</p> <p>In a study of veterans published Wednesday, about one-third who had breakthrough infections showed signs of long COVID.</p>

A separate report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that up to a year after an initial coronavirus infection, 1 in 4 adults aged 65 and older had at least one potential long COVID health problem, compared with 1 in 5 younger adults.

Long COVID refers to any of more than two dozens symptoms that linger, recur or first appear at least one month after a coronavirus infection. These can affect all parts of the body and may include fatigue, shortness of breath, brain fog and blood clots.

Coronavirus vaccines that help prevent initial infections and serious illnesses provide some protection against long COVID but mounting research shows not as much as scientists had first hoped.

The veterans study published in Nature Medicine reviewed medical records of mostly white male veterans, aged 60, on average. Of the 13 million veterans, almost 3 million had been vaccinated last year, through October.

About 1%, or nearly 34,000, developed breakthrough infections. Lead author Dr. Ziyad Al-Aly noted that the study was done before the highly contagious omicron variant appeared at the end of the year and said the rate of breakthrough infections has likely increased.

Breakthrough infections and long COVID symptoms were more common among those who had received Johnson & Johnson's single-dose shot compared with two doses of either Moderna or Pfizer vaccines. Whether any had received booster shots is not known; the first booster wasn't OK'd in the U.S. until late September.

Overall, 32% had long COVID symptoms up to six months after breakthrough infections. That's compared with 36% of unvaccinated veterans who had been infected and developed long COVID.

Vaccination reduced the chances for any long COVID symptoms by a "modest" 15%," although it cut the risk in half for lingering respiratory or clotting problems, said Al-Aly, a researcher with Washington University and the Veterans Affairs health system in St. Louis. These symptoms included persistent shortness of breath or cough and blood clots in lungs or veins in the legs.

Infectious disease expert Dr. Kristin Englund, who runs a center for long COVID patients at the Cleveland Clinic, said the Nature Medicine study mirrors what she sees at her clinic. Long COVID patients there include people who were vaccinated and received boosters.

"As we have no clear treatments for long COVID, it is important for everyone to get vaccinated and use other proven methods of prevention such as masking and social distancing in order to prevent infections with COVID and thus long COVID," Englund said.

The CDC report, released Tuesday, used medical records for almost 2 million U.S. adults from the start of the pandemic in March 2020 to last November. They included 353,000 who had COVID-19. Patients were tracked for up to a year to determine if they developed any of 26 health conditions that have been attributed to long COVID.

Those who had COVID were much more likely than other adults without COVID to develop at least one of these conditions, and risks were greatest for those aged 65 and older. Information on vaccination, sex and race was not included.

Breathing problems and muscle aches were among the most common conditions.

Older adults' risks were higher for certain conditions, including strokes, brain fog, kidney failure and mental health problems. The findings are worrisome because those conditions can hasten older adults' needs for long-term care, the report authors said.

	They stressed that routine assessment of all COVID patients “is critical to reduce the incidence” of long COVID.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/26 China foreign minister starts Pacific tour
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/chinas-foreign-minister-starts-pacific-tour-solomons-84987008
GIST	<p>WELLINGTON, New Zealand -- China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi and a 20-strong delegation arrived in the Solomon Islands Thursday at the start of an eight-nation tour that comes amid growing concerns about Beijing’s military and financial ambitions in the South Pacific region.</p> <p>Australia was scrambling to counter the move by sending its own Foreign Minister Penny Wong to Fiji to shore up support in the Pacific. Wong has been on the job just five days following an Australian election and had just arrived back Wednesday night from a meeting in Tokyo.</p> <p>“We need to respond to this because this is China seeking to increase its influence in the region of the world where Australia has been the security partner of choice since the Second World War,” Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese told the Australian Broadcasting Corp.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the Media Association of Solomon Islands was calling on its members to boycott a news conference being held in the capital, Honiara, by Wang and his counterpart from the Solomon Islands, Jeremiah Manele.</p> <p>That's because only selected media were invited to the event, and the schedule allowed for just a single question to be asked of Wang by China's state-owned broadcaster CCTV.</p> <p>“Its a tough call to make regarding the media boycott for the press event on Thursday,” wrote association president Georgina Kekea on Twitter. “Our protest is for our govt to see our disappointment. They have failed us & they failed to protect #democracy.”</p> <p>China signed a security pact with the Solomon Islands last month in a move that sent shock waves around the world.</p> <p>That pact has raised fears that China could send troops to the island nation or even establish a military base there, not far from Australia. The Solomon Islands and China say there are no plans for a base.</p> <p>A draft document obtained by The Associated Press shows that Wang is hoping to strike a deal with 10 small Pacific nations during his visit. The sweeping agreement covers everything from security to fisheries and is seen by one Pacific leader as an attempt by Beijing to wrest control of the region.</p> <p>Wang is hoping the countries will endorse the pre-written agreement as part of a joint communique after a May 30 meeting in Fiji with the other foreign ministers.</p> <p>During his 10-day visit, Wang is also planning to make stops in Kiribati, Samoa, Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and East Timor.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/25 Russia bolsters army, tightens Ukraine grip
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/ukraine-civilians-killed-russia-focuses-fire-east-84959455
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine -- Russian President Vladimir Putin issued an order Wednesday to fast track Russian citizenship for residents of parts of southern Ukraine largely held by his forces, while lawmakers in Moscow passed a bill to strengthen the stretched Russian army.</p>

Putin's decree applying to the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions could allow Russia to strengthen its hold on territory that lies between eastern Ukraine, where Moscow-backed separatists occupy some areas, and the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia seized in 2014.

The Russian army is engaged in an intense battle for Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland, known as the Donbas. In a sign that the Kremlin is trying to bolster its stretched military machine, Russian lawmakers agreed to scrap the age limit of 40 for those signing their first voluntary military contracts.

A description of the bill on the parliament website indicated older recruits would be allowed to operate precision weapons or serve in engineering or medical positions. The chair of the Russian parliament's defense committee, Andrei Kartapolov, said the measure would make it easier to hire people with "in-demand" skills.

Russian officials say only volunteer contract soldiers are sent to fight in Ukraine, although they acknowledge that some conscripts were put into the fighting by mistake in the early stages of the war.

Three months into Russia's invasion, Putin visited a military hospital in Moscow on Wednesday and met with some soldiers wounded in Ukraine, the Kremlin said in a statement.

It was his first known visit with soldiers fighting in Ukraine since he launched the war on Feb. 24. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has visited wounded soldiers, civilians and children — including at times when Russian troops were fighting on the outskirts of Kyiv.

A reporter for the state-run Russia1 TV channel posted a video clip on Telegram showing Putin in a white medical coat talking to a man in hospital attire, presumably a soldier.

The man, filmed from behind standing up and with no visible wounds, tells Putin that he has a son. The president, accompanied by Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, responds: "He will be proud of his father," before shaking the man's hand.

Zelenskyy reiterated Wednesday that he would be willing to negotiate with Putin directly but said Moscow needs to retreat to the positions it held before the invasion and must show it's ready to "shift from the bloody war to diplomacy."

"I believe it would be a correct step for Russia to make," Zelenskyy told leaders at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, by video link.

He also said Ukraine wants to drive Russian troops out of all captured areas. "Ukraine will fight until it reclaims all its territories," Zelenskyy said. "It's about our independence and our sovereignty."

In his nightly address to the nation, Zelenskyy strongly rebuffed those in the West who suggest Ukraine cede control of areas occupied by Russian troops for the sake of reaching a peace agreement.

Those "great geopoliticians" who suggest this are disregarding the interests of ordinary Ukrainians — "the millions of those who actually live on the territory that they propose exchanging for an illusion of peace," he said. "We always have to think of the people and remember that values are not just words."

Zelenskyy compared those who argue for giving Russia a piece of Ukraine to those who in 1938 agreed to cede territory to Hitler in hopes of preventing World War II.

Russia already had a program to expedite the naturalization of people living in Luhansk and Donetsk, the two eastern Ukraine provinces that make up the Donbas and where the Moscow-backed separatists hold large areas as self-declared independent republics.

During a visit to the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions last week, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Marat Khusnullin indicated they could become part of "our Russian family."

A Russia-installed official in the Kherson region has predicted the region would become part of Russia. An official in Zaporizhzhia said Wednesday that the region's pro-Kremlin administration would seek that as well.

Melitopol, the Zaporizhzhia region's second-largest city, plans to start issuing Russian passports in the near future, said the Russia-installed acting mayor, Galina Danilchenko.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, who attended the Davos forum in person, called for friendly countries — particularly the United States — to provide Ukraine with multiple launch rocket systems so it could try to recapture lost territory.

“Every day of someone sitting in Washington, Berlin, Paris and other capitals, and considering whether they should or should not do something, costs us lives and territories,” Kuleba said.

Zelenskyy said his army was facing the fiercest attack possible in the east by Russian forces, which in some places have many more weapons and soldiers. He pleaded for even more military assistance from the West, “without exception, without restrictions. Enough to win.”

The governor of the Luhansk region, Serhiy Haidai, accused Russia of targeting shelters where civilians were hiding in the city of Sievierodonetsk.

“The situation is serious,” Haidai said in a written response to questions from The Associated Press. “The city is constantly being shelled with every possible weapon in the enemy’s possession.”

Sievierodonetsk and nearby Lysychansk are the largest remaining towns held by Ukraine in Luhansk. The region is “more than 90%” controlled by Russia, Haidai said, adding that a key supply route for Kyiv's troops was coming under pressure despite stiff Ukrainian resistance.

Haidai said the road between Lysychansk and the city of Bakhmut to the southwest was “constantly being shelled” and that Russian sabotage and reconnaissance teams were approaching.

The governor of the Donetsk region, Pavlo Kyrylenko, said four civilians were injured when two rockets hit the town of Pokrovsk early Wednesday.

One strike left a crater at least three meters (10 feet) deep, with the remnants of what appeared to be a rocket still smoldering. A row of low terraced houses near the strike suffered significant damage.

“There’s no place to live in left. Everything is smashed,” Viktoria Kurbonova, a mother of two who lived in one of the terraced houses, said.

An earlier strike about a month ago blew out the windows, which were replaced with plastic sheeting. Kurbonova thinks that probably saved their lives since there was no glass flying around.

In other developments, Russia said the strategic Ukrainian port of Mariupol was functional again following a nearly three-month siege that ended with the surrender last week of the last Ukrainian fighters holed up in a giant steel plant. Russia now has full control of Mariupol, on the Sea of Azov.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said the separatists in Donetsk planned to set up a tribunal to put the fighters on trial and that Moscow welcomes the action.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/24 Hungary: ‘state of danger’ over Ukraine war
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/hungary-announces-state-danger-war-ukraine-84939444

GIST	<p>BUDAPEST, Hungary -- Hungary has declared a legal “state of danger” in response to Russia's war in neighboring Ukraine, the prime minister announced Tuesday, allowing the right-wing nationalist government to take special measures without the participation of the legislature.</p> <p>In a video on social media, Prime Minister Viktor Orban said that the war in Ukraine represents “a constant threat to Hungary” which was “putting our physical security at risk and threatening the energy and financial security of our economy and families.”</p> <p>In response, he said, a “war state of danger” would take effect beginning Wednesday, allowing the government “to respond immediately and protect Hungary and Hungarian families by any means possible.”</p> <p>The move came after Orban's ruling party passed a constitutional amendment Tuesday allowing for legal states of danger to be declared when armed conflicts, wars or humanitarian disasters were taking place in neighboring countries.</p> <p>The special legal order permits the government to enact laws by decree without parliamentary oversight, and permits the temporary suspension of and deviation from existing laws.</p> <p>Hungary's government implemented similar measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to outcry from critics and legal observers, who argued they gave the government authority to rule by decree. That special legal order was set to expire on June 1.</p> <p>Orban's government has been accused of eroding democratic freedoms in Hungary since taking power in 2010, and using state resources to cement its power. The governing Fidesz party won a fourth-straight election victory on April 3, giving Orban, the longest-serving leader in the European Union, an additional four-year term.</p> <p>In a statement Tuesday, Emese Pasztor of the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union wrote that Hungary's government was “once again adapting the rules of the game to its own needs.”</p> <p>“By always allowing the possibility of introducing a special legal order in the future, it will lose its special character. It will become the new normal, which will threaten the fundamental rights of all of us, and rule by decree will further diminish the importance of Parliament,” Pasztor wrote.</p> <p>Governmental decrees issued through the special legal order are valid for 15 days unless extended by Hungary's parliament. Orban's Fidesz party has held a two-thirds majority in parliament since 2010.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/25 Philippines declare Marcos Jr president
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/marcos-jr-proclaimed-philippine-president-huge-win-84961123
GIST	<p>MANILA, Philippines -- Ferdinand Marcos Jr. was proclaimed the next president of the Philippines by a joint session of Congress on Wednesday following a landslide election triumph 36 years after his dictator father was ousted in a pro-democracy uprising.</p> <p>The Senate and House of Representatives also declared that his separately elected vice presidential running mate, Sara Duterte, had won by a wide margin. She is the daughter of outgoing President Rodrigo Duterte, whose turbulent six-year term ends on June 30.</p> <p>They will lead a nation battered by COVID-19 lockdowns, crushing poverty, gaping inequality, Muslim and communist insurgencies, crime and political divisions further inflamed by the May 9 election.</p>

With his 92-year-old mother, Imelda Marcos, his wife, family and siblings beside him, Marcos Jr.'s hands were raised by the Senate president and House speaker in a plenary hall bedecked with a huge Philippine flag to applause from the audience, which included diplomats.

"I'm humbled," he later told reporters. "I thank our people and, beyond that, I promise you that we may not be perfect but we will always strive to perfection."

"I ask you all pray for me, wish me well. I want to do well because when the president does well, the country does well," he said, without taking any questions.

Marcos Jr., a 64-year-old former governor, congressman and senator, has refused to acknowledge or apologize for massive human rights violations and plunder under his father's rule and has defended his legacy.

When they take office, Marcos Jr. and Sara Duterte will likely face demands to prosecute her father over thousands of killings of mostly poor suspects under his yearslong crackdown on illegal drugs. The deaths are currently under investigation by the International Criminal Court.

Marcos Jr. received more than 31 million votes and Sara Duterte more than 32 million out of more than 55 million votes cast in the election. It was the first majority presidential victory in the Asian democracy in decades.

During the campaign, they avoided controversial issues and focused on a call for national unity, although their fathers' presidencies opened some of the most volatile divisions in the country's history. Marcos Jr. appealed to be judged "not by my ancestors, but by my actions."

Sen. Imee Marcos, his sister, thanked those who voted for him after what she described as decades of "ridicule and oppression."

"We're very, very grateful for a second chance," she told reporters before the proclamation. "Our family went through a lot and after 1986, we faced all sorts of cases, ridicule and oppression" for nearly four decades.

In Marcos Jr.'s campaign headquarters, supporters waved Philippine flags, flashed the victory sign and held a streamer congratulating him and Sara Duterte.

Still, both have been hounded by their fathers' reputations.

Riot police used a water cannon and shields to prevent a few hundred activists from marching to Congress to oppose Wednesday's proclamations, injuring at least 14 protesters, the left-wing group Bayan said.

"Ferdinand Sr. tortured a lot of people, many were killed and many are still missing up to now. There is no justice for their families. Many starved and that was also the same in Duterte's period," protester Mimi Domingo said.

Last week, human rights activists submitted a petition to the Supreme Court against Marcos Jr.'s eligibility, citing his past tax conviction. They asked the court to block his proclamation, but no such order was issued. The complaint was earlier dismissed by the Commission on Elections.

His father was forced from power by a largely peaceful "People Power" uprising in 1986 and died in 1989 while in exile in Hawaii without admitting any wrongdoing, including accusations that he, his family and cronies amassed an estimated \$5 billion to \$10 billion while he was in power.

A Hawaii court later found him liable for human rights violations and awarded \$2 billion from his estate to compensate more than 9,000 Filipinos who filed a lawsuit against him for torture, incarceration, extrajudicial killings and disappearances.

	<p>Imelda Marcos and her children were allowed to return to the Philippines in 1991 and worked on a stunning political comeback, helped by a well-funded social media campaign to refurbish the family name.</p> <p>Along metropolitan Manila's main avenue, democracy shrines and monuments erected after Marcos' downfall stand prominently. The anniversary of his ouster is celebrated each year as a special national holiday, and a presidential commission that has worked for decades to recover ill-gotten wealth still exists.</p> <p>Marcos Jr. has not explained how he will deal with such remainders of the past.</p> <p>"What happens to all the monuments that commemorate all those lives lost? What happens to all those monuments that celebrate our collective victories?" asked Pio Abad, a Filipino artist who opened an art exhibit last month focusing on the extravagant lifestyle of the Marcoses when they were in power amid the country's appalling poverty.</p> <p>"History is at stake and that is probably, for me, one of the largest things at risk," said Abad, whose activist father was detained after the dictator imposed martial law in 1972.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/25 Executive Order: federal policing reform
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/biden-orders-federal-policing-reform-2nd-anniversary-george/story?id=84976784
GIST	<p>On the second anniversary of George Floyd's death at the hands of Minneapolis police, President Joe Biden on Wednesday signed an executive order on policing reforms for federal law enforcement.</p> <p>He had made a campaign promise to enact broader reform -- but Democrats in Congress failed to overcome Republican opposition to a measure that would hold local police accountable -- by making federal funding contingent on departments following congressionally-imposed requirements. The order signed Wednesday will apply to roughly 100,000 federal officers total, administration officials said.</p> <p>Speaking in the East Room surrounded by Floyd's family members, relatives of Breonna Taylor and civil rights leaders, Biden celebrated the order as a "measure of what we can do together to heal the very soul of this nation to address profound fear and trauma exhaustion."</p> <p>But first, he and Vice President Kamala Harris briefly addressed the shooting that took place Tuesday at a Texas elementary school that left 19 young children and two teachers dead.</p> <p>"Enough is enough," Harris said. "We must work together to create an America where everyone feels safe in their community, where children feel safe in their schools."</p> <p>Biden, who confirmed he will be traveling to Texas with first lady Jill Biden in the coming days, called for gun control reform.</p> <p>"We're here today for the same purpose," Biden said, "to come together and say enough, to act, we must."</p> <p>The executive order signed by Biden will create a new national database that contains records of federal officer misconduct, including convictions, terminations, de-certifications, civil judgments, resignations and retirements while under investigation for serious misconduct.</p> <p>It also requires all federal law enforcement agencies to revise use-of-force policies, banning chokeholds and restricting the use of no-knock warrants -- two tactics that were widely criticized following the deaths of Floyd and Taylor.</p>

	<p>Floyd died after a Minneapolis police officer knelt on his neck for more than nine minutes. Taylor, a Black medical worker, was shot and killed by Louisville, Kentucky, police using a no-knock warrant in March 2020.</p> <p>Vice President Harris said Wednesday it was an honor to be joined by the families, stating she's been moved by their courage.</p> <p>"Your loved ones should be with us today," she added. "You should not have to mourn, should never have had to mourn in order for our nation to feel your pain and to understand what is wrong and to agree that something must be done."</p> <p>Harris also criticized Senate Republicans for not supporting the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, a package of reforms passed by the House last year, stating the GOP members, "walked away from their moral obligation to address what caused millions of Americans to march in the streets."</p> <p>On Wednesday, Biden once again called on lawmakers to pass the George Floyd Justice and Policing Act, stating he held off on signing the executive order because he was afraid it would undercut the effort on Capitol Hill to pass reforms. "Today we're acting," Biden said. "We're showing that speaking out matters, feeling engaged matters, that the work of our time -- healing the soul of this nation -- is ongoing and unfinished and requires all of us never to give up." Biden invited Floyd's daughter, Gianna, to come and sit at the desk where he signed the order.</p> <p>"A few years ago ... she pulled me aside and she said, 'My daddy is gonna change the world,'" Biden said at the ceremony.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/25 Schools campus safety top concern
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/one-day-after-texas-school-massacre-campus-safety-top-of-mind-in-washington-state
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Safety is top of mind for local students and their families in the wake of a mass shooting Tuesday inside a south central Texas classroom.</p> <p>Washington schools Superintendent Chris Reykdal on Wednesday outlined what he believes are the best next steps the state's districts can take to help families feel safe while sending their children to school.</p> <p>The classroom massacre inside the Uvalde, Texas left 19 students and two adults dead with several more injured. It has led to reflections about gun violence on school campuses.</p> <p>"I feel that should never happen," Franklin High School senior Carmonte Banks said.</p> <p>"It sucks and it's sad that it has to happen in this country," high school senior Jaeden Thorn said.</p> <p>"Like all parents, you just hug your kids," Reykdal said. "I try to talk to them openly about it."</p> <p>Seattle Public Schools in an emailed statement said it recognizes that district "students, families, staff, and community, may feel heightened concern about safety in our schools," which is why they regularly evaluate safety procedures "and will review findings from events occurring nationally when available."</p> <p>Reykdal said districts statewide already have strong safety practices in places that include school resource officers, partnerships with local law enforcement and threat assessment teams that intervene when we think a student is in crisis and may be harmful to themselves or others.</p> <p>Although school districts review their emergency procedures every year, Reykdal said the Texas tragedy can lead some districts to double down on those evaluations.</p>

Reykdal is also urging state and federal lawmakers to pass gun control legislation to complement the work schools are doing.

“For those asking us to harden our schools and put guns in everyone’s hands, we’re simply not going to do that, because the risk is so much greater than the benefit,” he said.

There are goals and changes that some Franklin High School students told KOMO News that they appreciate in addition to the day-to-day security measures at school.

At “Franklin, they do all the little things,” Thorn said. “You know, lock the doors when it's passing period (and) things of that nature. They know everybody.”

Seattle Public School officials said there is ongoing work taking place at buildings to minimize or eliminate the need for multiple entry points. The district said other safety protocols already in place include:

- Each high school has security team members on campus throughout the school day.
- SPS Safety and Security staff are on call to assist any school with regional staffing to ensure a shorter response time.
- The SPS Alarm Response team monitors building alarms and visits schools after hours.
- A security specialist team works in schools supporting principals with a focus on de-escalation and student support, along with building safety and being alert to and addressing exterior issues.
- Schools are encouraged to keep as many doors locked as possible during the school day.
- The Safe Schools Hotline at 206-252-0510 is staffed 24 hours a day and we encourage students, staff, and families to report any incidents or concerns using that number.

Statewide, the Washington Education Association said local unions are working at the bargaining table with districts to outline safety prevention and crisis preparation.

“WEA has long worked with the legislature to improve school safety and pass common-sense gun reforms. On a national level, NEA is working to pass common-sense gun reforms,” a spokesperson said.

Families can check their child's district to learn their specific emergency protocols.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 Richland school district tightens security
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/richland-school-district-to-tighten-security-after-texas-shooting
GIST	<p>RICHLAND -- The Richland School District is making changes to improve security at its schools after the devastating tragedy in Uvalde, Texas.</p> <p>In a message released by the district superintendent, Dr. Shelley Redinger says the district's thoughts are with the community of Uvalde, Texas struggling with the senseless violence that occurred at Robb Elementary on May 24.</p> <p>Redinger goes on to say that safety is the district’s top priority and it is taking immediate actions to strengthen school security for the remainder of the school year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• All elementary and middle schools will have their front entrances locked during the school day with visitors required to call in to enter. High schools will reduce the number of unlocked exterior entrances. Entrances needed for passing periods will have increased monitoring.• District leaders maintain close relationships with law enforcement and emergency response agencies and we are working with them to increase police officer presence at our schools along with our security staff. <p>Redinger says there are already a number of things being done to keep kids safe. The district already has the following protocols:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure entrance vestibules have been added to schools in recent years as they are rebuilt and refurbished. Exterior cameras are installed at elementary schools and exterior and interior cameras at our middle and high schools. Alarm systems and badge access in place for non-primary entrances at schools. School resource officers (SROs) and district security staff are on the campuses of Hanford and Richland High schools. District and school staff have regular drills and other training to be prepared for threats. Students, staff and anyone in our community are encouraged to access the district's Vector Alert system to submit tips regarding issues such as cyberbullying, harassment, threats, weapons, drugs, mental illness, domestic abuse, family/home issues and suspicious activities in our schools. Tips may be sent online, through email, text or phone call. Those submitting a tip may remain anonymous.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/25 Threat locks down Blaine public schools
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/blaine-school-district-goes-into-lockdown-at-all-campus-es-after-reported-threat https://komonews.com/news/local/blaine-school-district-goes-into-lockdown-at-all-campus-es-after-reported-threat
GIST	<p>BLAINE, Wash. — Police lifted a district-wide lockdown for Blaine public schools after an unspecified threat prompted officials to close school campuses.</p> <p>No injuries have been reported and authorities have not elaborated on what led to the lockdown at its main campus location, which includes K-12 students, around 4 p.m.</p> <p>The school district says some students in grades 6-12 were initially evacuated to the Boys and Girls Club and released to families.</p> <p>Other students were set to be moved to stadium so they can be released to family.</p> <p>Lt. Michael Munden with the BPD said a student received a threat over text, indicating the suspect was heading to school. The text came in around 2:50 p.m. and school has been locked down since.</p> <p>Anyone who was waiting for pickup from school was asked to leave the area.</p> <p>The lockdown occurred one day after a Texas mass shooting at an elementary school, where more than 20 died.</p> <hr/> <p>BLAINE, Wash. — The Blaine School District has canceled classes on Thursday after a student received a series of threats via text messages Wednesday that led to an hours-long lockdown.</p> <p>No injuries were reported during the lockdown, which began shortly before 3 p.m. and included K-12 students.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/25 Alaska Air pilots authorize future strike
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/alaska-airlines-pilots-vote-overwhelmingly-to-authorize-a-strike
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Alaska Airlines pilots have voted overwhelmingly to authorize a future strike if current contract negotiations with management and federal mediation efforts fail.</p> <p>The Air Line Pilots Association said Wednesday that almost 96% of its members cast mail-in votes and that 99% of those authorized the union's leaders to call a strike if necessary and when permitted after a</p>

prolonged process managed by the National Mediation Board, according to a report from [The Seattle Times](#).

Following an informational picket in April by 1,500 off-duty pilots, the vote may increase pressure on Alaska Airlines management to come to a contract settlement. The union has been stalled for years trying to negotiate a contract that addresses work rules, scheduling flexibility and career security.

In a memo to the pilots, Capt. Will McQuillen, council chairperson of the pilots association's Alaska unit, said the vote provides union negotiators "an important tool to help achieve your goals."

He said it also sends "a clear message that you are unwilling to fall further behind your peers" at other major airlines.

After a management request, the pilots' union and company officials are meeting again this week. The union told its members it will report to them Friday on the outcome of those talks.

A strike, however, cannot happen soon.

Federal legislation governing national transportation workers mandates that before they can strike, the National Mediation Board must decide that additional mediation efforts would not be productive and must offer an opportunity to resolve the contract through arbitration. That could take months.

If either side declines the arbitration, a further 30-day "cooling off" period is required before strike action.

A spate of Alaska Airlines flight cancellations over the past two months were not because of labor action by the pilots but were caused by a general pilot shortage.

Alaska's management misjudged how many newly hired pilots would graduate from its training school this spring. The airline cut its flight schedule in response and said the situation should substantially improve in June.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 Gov., Lt Gov. test positive for Covid
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/washington-governor-jay-inslee-tests-positive-for-covid-19-experiencing-mild-symptoms
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash. - Washington Governor Jay Inslee tested positive for COVID-19 and is experiencing "very mild" symptoms, his office announced Wednesday.</p> <p>In a statement, Inslee's office said the Democratic governor tested positive on a rapid antigen test and is experiencing mild symptoms, including a cough. Inslee is working from home and setting up antiviral treatments.</p> <p>Inslee added that he was thankful to be vaccinated and boosted.</p> <p>"I am experiencing very mild symptoms and am most glad I'm vaccinated and boosted," Inslee said. "I hope others consider getting their booster because it's very effective in preventing serious illness."</p> <p>"Aside from having a slight cough, the governor is feeling well and in typical good spirits," said Jaime Smith, Inslee's communications director. "He is working from home and will soon receive antiviral treatments. As we're seeing, the current COVID variants are extremely contagious and vaccinations remain the most important tool to protecting ourselves against serious illness, hospitalization and death. We hope every eligible Washingtonian takes advantage of these life-saving tools."</p> <p>At a news conference the state's public health leaders said they weren't issuing mandates but "strongly recommending" masks be worn indoors in crowded or confined places.</p>

"This is the time to remind ourselves that this pandemic is not over," said Secretary of Health Dr. Umair Shah.

Clallam and San Juan counties have been rated 'high risk' for contracting COVID-19 by the CDC. King, Snohomish and Jefferson counties have moved into the 'medium risk' category.

Lieutenant Governor Denny Heck shortly after announced he also tested positive for COVID-19. His office notes Heck and Inslee have not been in proximity with each other

Heck previously tested positive for the virus in February, and says he feels only mild symptoms akin to "a bad head cold."

Heck says he is treating his COVID-19 with Paxlovid, an FDA-approved antiviral pill for the coronavirus. He released the following statement:

"I've tested positive for COVID-19. I'm working from home and experiencing mild but unpleasant symptoms, similar to a bad head cold.

"I'm glad to be vaccinated and double-boosted. I know my symptoms could be much worse if I wasn't vaccinated, and I urge everyone eligible for a booster shot to go and get one.

"I've begun a regimen of Paxlovid, one of the antiviral pills approved by the FDA for fighting COVID-19. Paxlovid and other treatments are now widely available in Washington state. I encourage anyone who tests positive to talk with their doctor or pharmacist about treatment options.

"I previously tested positive in February but experienced no symptoms. Unfortunately COVID-19 reinfections can happen, and that's another good reason to go and get that booster shot.

"I look forward to resuming my full public schedule once cleared to do so."

As of early May, the state recorded a seven-day infection rate of about 245.3 cases per 100,000 people, or about 2,600 new infections per day. In mid-March, Washington's infection rate was about 40.4 cases per 100,000.

Hospitalizations recently surpassed about six COVID hospital admissions per 100,000, or about 67 new hospitalizations per day — up from fewer than two hospitalizations per 100,000 in early April.

The state's COVID death rate hasn't seen significant changes in recent months, and has consistently been on the decline since late January, according to Department of Health data.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 Puyallup 'emergency expelled' student
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/student-emergency-expelled-threat-of-violence-against-ferrucci-jr-high-puyallup-wa
GIST	<p>PUYALLUP, Wash. - A student was emergency expelled from Ferrucci Junior High after threats of violence against the school were reported to police.</p> <p>According to the school, the Puyallup Police Department reported a threat to Ferrucci administrators. A parent had notified police that a student intended to cause violence at the junior high school.</p> <p>Officers visited the student's home and interviewed that person. The student was then emergency expelled from the school.</p>

	<p>According to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, emergency expulsion occurs when "a school district immediately removes a student from school because the district believes the student's presence in the building poses either an immediate and continuing danger to others or an immediate and continuing threat to the educational process. An emergency expulsion is an out-of-school exclusionary discipline action."</p> <p>An emergency expulsion must end or be converted to another discipline action within 10 school days, according to OSPI.</p> <p>Authorities said the school discipline process and law enforcement investigation were ongoing.</p> <p>No further details have been released at this time.</p> <p>The threat investigation comes just a day after a gunman stormed into Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas and killed 19 children and two teachers. It was the United States' deadliest school shooting in nearly a decade. Law enforcement officers killed the shooter, an 18-year-old who had shot and wounded his grandmother and spelled out his violent plans in online messages shortly before the massacre.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/25 Pierce Co. up to 'medium' CDC Covid level
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/coronavirus/article261710197.html
GIST	<p>Try as we might to escape it, the COVID-19 pandemic is still in full swing, particularly in Western Washington and notably in Pierce County.</p> <p>On Tuesday, Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department reported 1,675 new cases of COVID-19 for May 15-21 and six new deaths. The previous week, 1,884 cases and seven new deaths were reported.</p> <p>Pierce County's COVID-19 total since March 2020 is 194,366 cases and 1,347 deaths.</p> <p>Last week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention moved Pierce County into its "medium" community level category for COVID, from its previous "low" ranking, in response to the rising cases.</p> <p>It's a cautionary tale as we head into Memorial Day weekend and the start of summer.</p> <p>BY THE NUMBERS</p> <p>Naomi Wilson, community assessment manager for the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, recently spoke with The News Tribune about what COVID-19 is like now in the county.</p> <p>"We are definitely seeing both our COVID-19 cases and hospitalization rates increase in Pierce County since March. We're certainly nowhere near Omicron levels. But we're about halfway to our Delta peak," last summer/early fall, Wilson said.</p> <p>She added, "We obviously know that what we're seeing is an undercount, due to over-the-counter tests, and so many people who aren't reporting those results."</p> <p>Wilson wrote about the COVID uptick in a recent health department blog entry, noting, "By mid-March our 7-day case rate dropped to almost 30 per 100,000. Since then, we've seen a steady increase."</p> <p>The county's current 7-day case rate per 100,000 is 232.6, which is 38.3 percent higher than the last 7-day period measured, according to TPCHD on Tuesday. The 7-day hospitalization rate per 100,000 is 7.5, which the department says is 78.6 percent higher than the previously reported 7-day period (May 1-7).</p>

More than 200 new cases per 100,000 moves you into the “medium” category; hospital admissions and inpatient bed use have to rise beyond 10.0 and 10 percent, respectively, to be considered “high”.

LIVING IN A ‘MEDIUM’ SPREAD

How careful should people be about gathering for the upcoming weekend, particularly for those vaccinated and boosted? Public Health – Seattle & King County Health Officer Dr. Jeff Duchin offered some perspective at a separate Monday news conference dealing with the area’s first presumptive case of monkeypox.

King County moved into the CDC’s medium community level category for COVID-19 in late April.

“We are recommending people wear a high-quality well-fitting face mask at indoor public spaces and people pay careful attention to ventilation,” he said. “Crowded indoor settings, poorly ventilated settings are high risk.”

He added that “testing also can be very valuable right now. Particularly before gathering with people who are at high risk, (take) rapid tests the day of the gathering as close as possible to the time and help you understand if you have a COVID infection and not spread it to others.”

Wilson also emphasized testing.

“It’s really about getting tested if you have symptoms, so making sure that if you have symptoms, get tested. If you’re in high risk for severe illness, then consider wearing a mask and talking to your health care provider whether or not you need to wear a mask in all settings,” she said. “And of course, getting vaccinated and getting boosted.”

“There is not any single person who hasn’t been impacted (by COVID),” Wilson said Monday. “And what we know that it’s been especially difficult for those who are most vulnerable. COVID is with us, and will be for some time, and we just have to continue to make safe and healthy decisions.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 WA ‘strongly recommend’ masks indoors
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/wa-health-leaders-renew-push-for-indoor-masking-as-covid-cases-rise-but-stop-short-of-mandates/
GIST	<p>The state’s public health leaders are again “strongly recommending” all Washingtonians wear face masks indoors as some COVID-19 trends continue to steadily rise, but are not issuing any mandates.</p> <p>Cases and hospitalizations have been increasing for the past two months as widespread indoor mask requirements ended and omicron subvariants picked up steam, but state Department of Health officials continue to report that severe illness and death remain much lower than in past surges. Now, their reminders of public health recommendations carry a stronger sense of urgency.</p> <p>“This is the time to remind ourselves that this pandemic is not over,” state Secretary of Health Dr. Umair Shah said in a Wednesday news conference. “In indoor settings that are crowded or in confined places, we absolutely want you to wear a mask.”</p> <p>As of early May, the state recorded a seven-day infection rate of about 245.3 cases per 100,000 people, or about 2,600 new infections per day. In mid-March, Washington’s infection rate was about 40.4 cases per 100,000.</p> <p>Hospitalizations recently surpassed about six COVID hospital admissions per 100,000, or about 67 new hospitalizations per day — up from fewer than 2 hospitalizations per 100,000 in early April.</p> <p>The state’s COVID death rate hasn’t seen significant changes in recent months, and has consistently been on the decline since late January, according to DOH data.</p>

“We’re not returning to any broad mask requirement at this time but strongly recommending masks be worn in crowded, indoor spaces or areas where there’s poor ventilation or air quality,” said Lacy Fehrenbach, the state’s deputy secretary for prevention and health.

Masks are required in the state’s hospitals, long-term care centers and correctional facilities, she added.

Other mitigation strategies, like frequent testing, are also encouraged since some “concerning gaps” have emerged in the state’s booster rates, said Michele Roberts, who has been leading the state’s COVID vaccine planning and distribution team.

More than 2.8 million additional doses, including boosters, have been distributed within the state, covering about 60% of eligible Washingtonians. But rates are less than 50% in some age groups, including people between 5 and 34, she said.

Booster rates have also been lagging in Black, Hispanic and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander communities, some of which is attributable to vaccine misinformation and ongoing concerns about the shots, Shah said.

The plea for Washingtonians to maintain consistent masking habits comes as some vaccine immunity wanes and much of the population waits for a second booster to be approved by the federal government.

“We know that the vaccine effectiveness decreases with time, so certainly we’ve seen that the more times you get boosted, the better your immune response is,” said Dr. Bob Lutz, one of DOH’s COVID medical advisers who also serves on the state Board of Health. “If you find you’re not quite yet eligible for a booster, I would fall back on these recommendations.”

[Return to Top](#)

Cyber Awareness

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 Conti leaks stolen Oregon county data
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/linn-county-oregon-data-leak-conti-ransomware/
GIST	<p>The Conti ransomware gang has published all of the data it stole during a January attack on the government servers of Linn County, Oregon.</p> <p>The group — which appears to be reorganizing itself, according to cybersecurity experts — released nearly 1,500 documents Wednesday. Linn County officials said they chose not to pay a ransom after realizing that they had backups and determining that the data was not particularly sensitive.</p> <p>Darrin Lane, administrative officer for Linn County, told The Record that the attack began on the morning of Jan. 24 and that the county’s IT team immediately began shutting down systems in order to limit the damage.</p> <p>The move was successful, and the county eventually realized that the attack was limited to two active directory domains. The attack brought down the government’s website, but several departments and offices were not affected, including the Sheriff’s Department or the Health Services Department.</p> <p>“The attack did impact our Road Department servers and we did receive information from the attackers that they had downloaded data from a Road Department server. We were provided with what appeared to be a directory listing of the server and that enabled us to understand what data was taken,” Lane said.</p> <p>Located between the cities of Eugene and Salem, the county has about 130,000 residents. Lane said the government worked with a consultant and its insurance company to figure out what happened and how to block any additional attacks. The county did not say how much the ransom demand was.</p>

“Fortunately, we had robust backups of all affected servers and datasets,” Lane said. “No data of any consequence was lost and all systems were back up and running by the end of the week with most back within three days.”

After a consultant spoke with Conti actors, the county decided against paying the ransom because much of what was stolen was not sensitive data and “would likely be considered public records under Oregon Law,” Lane said.

Because the county had backups, there was no need to decrypt any data, making the decision even easier. As a precaution, the county notified the FBI and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, Lane said.

When provided with a sample of the documents leaked on Wednesday, Lane said it was a copy of a document that is public record and is subject to release to anyone who requests it.

“Having the benefit of several months to consider the impacts of the ransomware attack, I feel good about how we responded. Of course, we are angry about being targeted but it’s clearly not personal,” Lane said.

The county’s cybersecurity is now stronger than before the attack, Lane said.

“All that being said, we understand that this is never really over, we all must continue to learn and employ appropriate systems and processes to protect our information technology infrastructure,” Lane noted.

Emsisoft threat analyst Brett Callow noted that Linn County is the 17th U.S. local government to be hit by ransomware so far this year.

“While it’s hard to see that as a win, it’s nonetheless a big improvement on the 36 governments which had been hit by the end of May last year,” Callow said.

Last week, cybersecurity researchers with AdvIntel said the Conti gang officially took much of its infrastructure offline.

The analysts said key features were missing from Conti’s leak site and much of its ransom-negotiating infrastructure was either shut down or “going through a massive reset.”

But the group has still been active, leaking stolen data and still conducting negotiations with victims.

Conti is still in the middle of executing a high-profile attack on the government of Costa Rica, and Callow shared screenshots of ongoing victim negotiations with the group.

“If they were shutting down, you’d think they’d be pushing to close. The extent to which Conti is still operating is not clear. At this point, they may well simply be winding up and attempting to monetize old attacks,” Callow said. “Given previous events, it’s hard to see that the Conti brand has a future.”

Recorded Future ransomware expert Allan Liska echoed those remarks, explaining that the Linn County release is most likely part of the group’s “going out of business, so everything must go” strategy.

“I think we may see some more dumps from older attacks in the next few weeks as Conti continues to restructure,” Liska said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 Pakistan shutters internet ahead of protests
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/pakistan-internet-shutdown-protests-imran-khan/

GIST	<p>Internet service in Pakistan is being artificially limited as the government seeks to shut down protests organized by former Prime Minister Imran Khan, who became the first leader in the country's history to be removed from office in a no-confidence motion in parliament on April 10.</p> <p>NetBlocks, an organization that tracks internet outages across the world, said there were disruptions to service from multiple providers across Pakistan after 5 p.m. local time Wednesday.</p> <p>Alp Toker, director of NetBlocks, told The Record that real-time network data showed the restriction coming into effect across multiple providers "in a pattern consistent with an intentional disruption to service."</p> <p>"The incident has widespread effect with high impact to major cities in Pakistan including but not limited to Islamabad, Karachi and Lahore," Toker said.</p> <p>NetBlocks' analysis shows that the activity "is consistent with previous recorded internet shutdowns, and is likely to significantly impact the flow of information as ousted PM Khan calls for anti-government protests," Toker said.</p> <p>The company's report corroborated what hundreds of Pakistani citizens and residents reported on social media.</p> <p>The government sent out a message on TV across Pakistan announcing the internet shut down.</p> <p>"The disruption affects service at the network layer and cannot be readily worked around through the use of VPN services. Some service remains available via alternative internet providers," NetBlocks noted.</p> <p>The Pakistani Foreign Ministry did not respond to requests for comment.</p> <p>Multiple news outlets in Pakistan have reported instances of violence across the country as Khan's supporters took to the streets to call for new elections.</p> <p>The current government, run by Shehbaz Sharif, shut down roads leading to the capital and fired tear gas at Khan supporters in the province of Punjab who attempted to remove the roadblocks.</p> <p>Sharif's government banned the planned protests after police officers were killed and officials with the government arrested thousands of Khan supporters on Tuesday night.</p> <p>Khan has told his supporters to defy the bans and roadblocks "at any cost."</p> <p>Pakistani leaders, including Khan himself, have a long history of imposing nationwide internet restrictions at times of unrest. An April report from Access Now, a nonprofit tracking internet access globally, found that Pakistan shut down the internet in response to protest movements several times throughout 2021.</p> <p>According to Access Now, the longest internet shutdowns they tracked occurred in Pakistan, where 4.5 million residents of the Federally Administered Tribal Area spent nearly four years without internet. The blackout ended in December 2021 after starting in 2016.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/25 Banks face threats Russian cyberattacks
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/critical-infrastructure/as-ukraine-conflict-continues-us-banks-still-face-threats-from-russian-cyberattacks
GIST	<p>When the Russo-Ukrainian war began in late February, there was an almost immediate response from government and cybersecurity experts alike: the U.S. financial industry should beware that just because they may not be affected by the ground assault, there was a good chance they'd be prime targets for the online attack that was threatened.</p>

Flash forward to today, in the face of sanctions from many countries and in many sectors, it would appear from headlines that it's the Russian banks, like Sberbank, that have [felt the wrath](#) of cyber-hijackers and even opposing nation-states. But experts on network security at U.S. financial institutions, which have been fending off Russian organized crime rings and even government-backed hackers for years, know that while the invasion of Ukraine may be winding down, [the potential cyberthreats](#) to their data, their money, their infrastructure and their customers press on.

"The Russia-Ukraine conflict will soon enter its third month. While [the initial uncertainty](#) has worn off, the cyberattacks purported by Russia and its operatives are likely to intensify as sanctions and the associated economic toll increase," said Dan Katz, cybersecurity and data privacy director at Mazars, a global consultancy.

["Russian cyberattacks will continue to inflict collateral damage](#) on a wide variety of organizations, but will likely continue to strongly target financial services organizations," he underscored.

This is not only due to the major role of the financial and payments industries play in the global critical infrastructure, and potential data and monetary profits to be had, but also because many U.S. banks still rely on fairly complex or siloed core systems — which are often much trickier to protect.

John Horn, director for the cybersecurity practice at the Aite-Novarica Group, a financial research and consulting firm, pointed out that "even before the U.S. imposed economic sanctions on Russia ... top cybersecurity agencies [warned](#) of the heightened threat of cyberattacks" on the U.S. financial infrastructure.

"Though many experts agree the threat remains," Horn added, "they disagree over its severity and why exactly Russia has not launched any major cyber weapons that we know of."

Another reason financial firms remain cautious in guarding their online flanks is simple revenge by Russia for those controversial sanctions imposed by the U.S. and other countries.

"When the sanctions were implemented against Putin, his oligarch supporters and Russia overall, Putin would like to apply pressure to the banks that are a key component of the U.S. GDP," said Tom Atkins, a network security expert at Attivo, who often works in the financial sector.

Hence, it is believed that more pointed and pernicious attacks on the U.S. financial infrastructure may yet come to the fore, according to Neal Bridges, CISO at [Query.AI](#) and a former NSA hacker, with the specific threats varying based on how each financial institution, service or third-party interacts with Russia and Ukraine.

For example, Bridges pointed out that Citigroup has an operating presence in Kyiv, which means that the global bank at least some physical IT infrastructure in place there, which is likely connected to Ukrainian internet, staffed by Ukrainian personnel, and affected by Ukrainian environmental variables.

Fellow expert Atkins agreed: "Putin is very likely to target U.S. banks that operate in Ukraine as he works to physically exert his control over that market. It is very likely that he has encouraged Russian cyber-criminal groups to pick up the pace of their attacks to inflict damage through ransomware and DDoS attacks."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 Remote work insider threat challenge
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/remote-access/remote-work-complicates-insider-threat-challenge-says-ex-bank-of-america-cio

GIST

With more than two decades of experience leading technology and information security teams at major blue-chip U.S. financial firms, including Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs, David Reilly understands the importance of evaluating and mitigating insider security threats within banks and investment firms.

“Insider threats are a challenge across industries, not only for financial services. The attack surface for insider threats has increased over the past few years,” said Reilly, who joined the boards of [Safe Security](#) and online banking fast-mover Ally Bank this month.

For example, system administrators and database administrators with privileged system access to critical information “undertake activities every day that need to be closely monitored,” he said. “That extends to third-party vendors with access to critical networks. All are adding to the [risk landscape](#).”

Most recently having served for roughly a decade as a CTO and later CIO of global banking and markets at Bank of America, Reilly stepped away from that role in October 2021. He said he is aware that hugely and quickly shifting work situations for financial past two years have greatly impacted [the insider risk](#).

“With remote work, the threat profile has further changed,” he added, “and is driving the need for security and risk practitioners to look at quantifying the risk posed by each employee, third-party, and application access to ensure that data is protected from all aspects.”

It’s commonly understood at this point that the damage wrought by insider-driven network compromises are typically far more damaging and costly than ones where employees are not involved. According to the 2022 Ponemon [“Cost of Insider Threats Global Report,”](#) cyber incidents that originate through malicious, negligent and compromised corporate employees have increased 44% in the past two years. The cost of breaches caused by insiders has risen by more than one-third over previous years to \$15.38 million. The time to rectify an insider breach also increased, from 77 days to 85 days, leading organizations to spend the most on containment.

Indeed, even before the pitfalls of insider malfeasance and mistakes were widely known, Bank of America was one of the first top-tier U.S. financial institutions to [capture headlines](#) 11 years ago when it was reported that employees at the second largest U.S. bank had run up at least \$10 million in losses through a fraud scam.

When “comprehensive risk qualification” is implemented, Reilly said that financial institutions can elicit “actionable insights which the security teams can use to prioritize remediation actions and tailor cybersecurity education for the company.”

Reilly said that globally, “there is an emerging drive to bring consistency to the reporting of cyber risk, [which] will further help set and understand risk tolerance inside an organization. To assess, prioritize, and mitigate cyber risk, including insider threats, consistent quantification and measurement are key.”

While most large, well-established enterprises, especially financial firms, already can boast a set of metrics and practices to assess and set risk tolerance, many have yet to agree on “a standard way to do that across companies and market segments,” Reilly said.

He compared this tracking of potential insider threats to “a chart of accounts and financial statements that allows for a standard language to discuss financial risk — that type of standard is one we lack for cyber risk.

“This is where the right cyber risk quantification and management platform can help, with the right set of consistent metrics to track and report these risks,” he said, “which can help security and business leaders prioritize and communicate cyber risks even more effectively, internally and across industries.”

[Return to Top](#)

SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/news/identity-and-access/identity-based-attacks-on-organizations-surged-in-2021
GIST	<p>Blumira on Wednesday released a report that said identity-based attacks and living-off-the-land behaviors were the top two threats organizations faced in 2021.</p> <p>The new data was based on an analysis of Blumira's security detections across log datasets of 230 organizations.</p> <p>Among the leading findings was that identity attacks surged. Attempts to authenticate into a honeypot or a fake log-in page designed to lure attackers was Blumira's No. 1 finding of 2021. Identity-driven techniques accounted for three out of Blumira's top five findings at 60%.</p> <p>The past few years accelerated change in the modern workplace with regards to how employees use tools to access and get work done, said Jim Simpson, CEO at Blumira. Simpson said unfortunately, threat actors are acutely aware that those changes often create security gaps, especially when it comes to managing identities.</p> <p>"The rise in identity-based attacks that we observed is a reminder that organizations need more visibility across their environments, especially cloud and hybrid environments," Simpson said.</p> <p>Zane Bond, director of product management at Keeper Security, said most attacks have several phases, from initial compromise, to recon, lateral movement, and then exfiltration. Bond said these identity-based attacks became a little easier after COVID, because everyone needed remote access to systems, and that access was set up in a hurry.</p> <p>"Companies were focused more on getting everyone up and working than they were on security," Bond said. "Using a password manager, in conjunction with a secrets management solution, can mitigate many of these types of attacks. Secure browser extensions, long, randomized passwords, and secure sharing largely mitigate password spraying, credential stuffing, and phishing. Even post-compromise, a secrets management solution can ensure that highly privileged credentials are not long standing on the target, but are only retrieved at runtime."</p> <p>Erkang Zheng, founder and CEO at JupiterOne, said that identity-defined security has become essential to organizations today. Zheng added that cybersecurity and infrastructure tooling shouldn't operate in silos.</p> <p>"Identity is not a tool that's meant to stand alone," Zheng said. "A strong security program connects identity directly to the infrastructure and security-related cyber assets in the enterprise. Without identity connections and context, security remains weak."</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/26 State of cybersecurity report 2022
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/2022-state-industry-report/
GIST	<p>Ransomware is the biggest concern for cybersecurity professionals, according to results of the Infosecurity Group's 2022 State of Cybersecurity Report, produced by Infosecurity Europe and <i>Infosecurity Magazine</i>.</p> <p>Cybersecurity Professionals' Number One Concern: Ransomware</p> <p>This attack vector was voted as the biggest cybersecurity trend (28%) by the survey respondents (including CISOs, CTOs, CIOs and academics), marking a significant change from the previous report in 2020, where ransomware did not break the top three. This follows surging ransomware incidents in 2021, with ransom demands and payments growing significantly last year. A number of these attacks have also impacted critical industries, for example, taking down the US' largest fuel pipeline.</p> <p>Victoria Baines, visiting research fellow at Bournemouth University, noted: "It started to have an impact on critical infrastructure, on states, on operational technology, and on large manufacturers. We went from</p>

a consumer citizen ransom of a couple of thousand dollars to millions for some of those higher-value targets.”

The survey respondents also highlighted the evolving tactics and capabilities of ransomware attackers. This includes threat actors becoming more sophisticated as they evolve into loosely coupled service-based operations, according to Guido Grillenmeier, chief technologist at [Semperis](#).

A number of cybersecurity professionals believe that cyber-criminal groups will become more guarded in their approach due to new initiatives by governments and law enforcement to tackle these activities. David Edwards, founder of [Zeroday360](#), outlined: “The risks ransomware groups are taking are higher, so they’re going to try and operate with a lower profile somewhere else.”

Cybersecurity Professionals' Number Two Concern: Nation-State Attacks

The second biggest concern for survey respondents was geopolitics/nation-state attacks (24%), particularly the shifting hostilities from the Russia-Ukraine conflict into cyberspace. Russia already had a reputation for conducting offensive cyber operations prior to the conflict, and the Ukrainian government and critical services have experienced numerous attacks both [before](#) and [since](#) the war began.

The risk of Russian cyber-attacks affecting the West following the imposition of sanctions and military and financial support for Ukraine was cited by a number of respondents. This includes those conducted by cyber-criminal groups based in Russia, such as Conti, which have links to the Kremlin. “I see an escalation in state-sponsored or acts in connection with state-sponsored activity,” said Ian Hill, director of cybersecurity at [BGL Insurance](#).

Growing geopolitical unrest makes the development of a global legal framework on cybercrime and cyber warfare more important than ever, according to Praveen Singh, head of global IT risk and cyber security, ICBC Standard Bank Plc. “We are going to get to a point globally where we have UN-level state laws on cybersecurity, warfare and rules, and they must be written down and agreed by the key nations around the world.”

Cybersecurity Professionals' Number Three Concern: Supply Chain Attacks

Another issue that surged in importance during this year’s report was supply chain attacks, ranking as the third most significant threat (22%). The cybersecurity risks posed by increasingly digitized and complex supply chains were demonstrated by the [SolarWinds attack](#) in December 2021. This was followed by several other high-profile supply chain incidents in 2021, such as the [Kaseya](#) attack.

Tiago Carvalho, technical security consultant at [Not So Secure](#), explained: “Supply chains have become more complex. This makes it difficult for companies to manage their risks.”

The respondents expect supply chain attacks to become a growing problem. This will be exacerbated by trends like employees continuing to procure their own software and online services, thereby widening the attack surface, and the growth of open-source software, with many of these libraries, utilities and applications having little security testing.

The report identified a total of 44 trends. Other notable issues highlighted by the respondents were:

- Cloud/multi-cloud security (21%)
- Remote work and return (18%)
- Deperimeterization and zero trust (15%),
- The human factor (15%)
- AI/ML (10%).

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 New ERMAC 2.0 Android malware
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/new-ermac-20-android-malware-steals-accounts-wallets-from-467-apps/

The ERMAC Android banking trojan has released version 2.0, increasing the number of applications targeted from 378 to 467, covering a much wider range of apps to steal account credentials and crypto wallets.

The goal of the trojan is to send stolen login credentials to threat actors, who then use them to take control of other people's banking and cryptocurrency accounts and conduct financial or other forms of fraud.

ERMAC is currently sold to members of darknet sites at a subscription rate of \$5,000 per month, which is \$2k over the price tag of the first version, reflecting the upgrade in features and its popularity.

Fake Bolt Food app

The first malware campaign utilizing the new ERMAC 2.0 malware is a fake Bolt Food application targeting the Polish market.

According to [ESET researchers](#), the threat actors distributed the Android app through the "bolt-food[.]site" website, impersonating the legitimate European food delivery service. This fake site is still up at the time of this writing.

Users likely end up on the fake site via a phishing email, malicious social media posts, smishing, malvertising, etc. If they download the app, they are met with a permission request that demands complete control of their device.

Targeting a galore of apps

ERMAC first determines what applications are installed on the host device and then sends the information to the C2 server.

The response contains the injection modules that match the application list in encrypted HTML form, which the malware decrypts and stores into the Shared Preference file as "setting.xml."

When the victim attempts to launch the real application, the injection action occurs, and a phishing page is loaded on top of the actual GUI. The harvested credentials are sent to the same C2 that provided the injections.

The commands supported by ERMAC 2.0 are the following:

- **downloadingInjections** – Sends the application list to download injections
- **logs** – Sends injection logs to the server
- **checkAP** – Check the application status and send it to the server
- **registration** – Sends device data
- **updateBotParams** – Sends the updated bot parameters
- **downloadInjection** – Used to receive the phishing HTML page

The banking apps targeted by EMAC 2.0 include institutions worldwide, making the app suitable for deployment in many countries. Moreover, popular cryptocurrency wallets and asset management apps are stolen too.

[Cyble's analysts](#) have found many similarities to the "Cerberus" malware, so it appears that the second version of the powerful trojan is based on it.

The extensive list of apps supported make this a potent malware, but it's worth noting that it would stumble into problems in Android versions 11 and 12, thanks to the additional restrictions that Google added to prevent Accessibility Service abuse.

To prevent infections from Android trojans, avoid downloading APKs from outside the Play Store, especially from websites you haven't confirmed as legitimate.

HEADLINE	05/25 DDoS extortion flagged as REvil redux?
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/ddos-extortion-attack-revil-resurgence
GIST	<p>Concern has been raised that a coordinated distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attack from a malicious actor could be associated with the notorious ransomware-as-a-service (RaaS) group REvil.</p> <p>According to a report from Akamai's Security Intelligence Response Team (SIRT), the attack was aimed at one of Akamai's hospitality customers. It consisted of a simple HTTP GET request, with a message demanding payment to a Bitcoin (BTC) wallet in exchange for stopping the attack. It also included an additional request for the company to stop operating in a specific country.</p> <p>Given the request to stop operating in the geospecific location appeared to stem from a recent Supreme Court decision in that country, the attack took on a political flavor that Akamai analysts say would be a break with REvil's earlier strategies.</p> <p>"We haven't seen them linked to hacktivism or political goals in any of the previously reported attacks," according to Akamai.</p> <p>On the technical front, the use of proxying capabilities and "fairly well" distributed IPs participating in the attack indicated that some level of coordination was required between the attacker and the proxying system, the Wednesday report notes.</p> <p>And, due to the extensive use of MikroTik devices identified in the attacking sources, the report suggests the attack could be supported by the MikroTik-based Meris botnet, which also has links to REvil. That said, the low volume of requests per second (Rps) and relatively unsophisticated nature of the campaign are atypical of Meris attacks, the report notes.</p> <p>REvil Redux?</p> <p>Since being reportedly dismantled by the Russian government earlier this year, there have been hints that REvil – or at least some previous members of the gang – is putting itself back together.</p> <p>In April, anti-malware firm Avast revealed that the company's software had blocked a ransomware sample that appeared to be generated using information that only previous members of the REvil group could have accessed. The discovery of the file came more than a week after cybersecurity firm Emsisoft revealed that the Web address of REvil's leak site now points to a new host, using both the REvil name and claiming to have compromised a US university and an oil company in India.</p> <p>Then in March, security firm Imperva reported mitigating a ransom DDoS attack tied to the Meris botnet measuring 2.5 million requests per second (Mrps). It included a series of ransom notes received by the customer that also claimed it came from REvil.</p> <p>While DDoS has been used in the past by some groups as an extra layer of pressure on ransomware victims to pay up, in both the March incident and this latest case, the attack is pure-play DDoS.</p> <p>"We haven't seen ransomware linked to these campaigns. The only tie to ransomware is the naming of REvil in the extortion demands," says SIRT engineer Chad Seaman.</p> <p>But as to whether this latest incident means that REvil is truly back and testing out new techniques, Seaman is skeptical.</p> <p>"I don't feel there are strong indicators here that this is indeed a resurgence of REvil," he says. "Even in the prior reported campaigns, I don't believe there are strong indicators that positively attribute those attacks to REvil in reality."</p> <p>For instance, the alert also pointed out that the BTC wallet does not have any previous connection to REvil. And the gang has maintained in the past that it is purely profit driven, after all.</p>

	<p>Seaman says the threat is more likely to stem from a copycat group looking to leverage REvil's notoriety.</p> <p>DDoS Extortion: A New Avenue for Fear</p> <p>He added that be it REvil or someone leveraging the name or reputation, the attack is clearly a play on fear in the hopes of easy money, so the most concerning takeaway from Akamai's investigation is the fear and panic associated with the threat.</p> <p>"This is the goal of these types of attacks: to scare the victim into paying, lending credibility to the threat using a scary name," he explained. "When these campaigns spin up and start to get press, it's typically followed by a surge of copycats."</p> <p>From Seaman's perspective, the publishing of reports like these requires a delicate balance of notifying the public of the threat without the threat turning into a wildfire of copycats.</p> <p>"We're hoping to help raise awareness while ramping down the associated fear because if we don't get out in front of these types of campaigns and fear-based reporting outpaces sane analysis, it only serves to fuel the fire, not fight it," he said.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/25 Brexit leak site linked to Russian hackers
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/vulnerabilities-threats/brexit-leak-site-linked-russian-hackers
GIST	<p>A new website has popped up called Very English Coop d'Etat, publishing what it claims are private emails from pro-Brexit leadership in the UK in an attempt to gin up conspiracy theories around the country's split from the European Union.</p> <p>Both UK foreign intelligence and Google's cybersecurity team confirmed that Russian cyberattack group Cold River is behind the campaign, according to Reuters.</p> <p>Steve Huntley, with Google's Threat Analysis Group, said that this campaign has "clear technical links" to other Cold River disinformation campaigns, according to the report.</p> <p>Victims of the leaks include former MI6 spy agency head Richard Dearlove, public Brexit supporter Gisela Stuart, and historian Robert Toombs, according to the report, who say their accounts were breached by Russian government actors.</p> <p>Reuters added that this incident is the second time since 2020 that Moscow-backed cyberattackers have stolen and leaked private emails from British national officials.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/25 Interpol massive 'Operation Delilah'
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/interpol-operation-delilah-bec-arrest
GIST	<p>Business email compromise (BEC) attacks have caused billions of dollars in losses to businesses globally in recent years — but now international law-enforcement has notched up another victory in the battle against them.</p> <p>Interpol on Wednesday announced that "Operation Delilah" has resulted in Nigerian police arresting the suspected head of SilverTerrier, aka TMT, which is a massive BEC operation that has been active since at least 2015, impacting thousands of businesses and individuals across four continents. The 37-year-old Nigerian man, who the Interpol did not name, was apprehended at the Murtala Muhammed International Airport in Lagos as he attempted to re-enter the country after fleeing ahead of the police in 2021.</p> <p>The arrest marks the culmination of a year-long investigative effort that was led by the Interpol's Africa desk and involved law-enforcement agencies from multiple countries. Three security vendors — Palo Alto Networks, Group-IB, and Trend Micro — also supported the effort by providing information on the BEC</p>

effort and its operators to the investigating entities. And Interpol also flagged CyberTOOLBELT as providing "ad hoc support" to the investigative effort.

Notching Up Arrests

[The latest arrest](#) brings to 15 the total number of individuals who have been arrested in recent years for their alleged involvement in BEC scams out of Nigeria — a hotbed of activity for this type of threat for years. In January, Nigeria's police, acting on information from [Interpol, arrested 11 individuals](#) for allegedly defrauding or attempting to defraud some 50,000 organizations worldwide via BEC scams. Six of the individuals were identified as belonging to SilverTerrier. At the time of the January arrests, law enforcement authorities recovered one laptop that contained a staggering 800,000 usernames and passwords that appeared to belong to victim organizations.

That 10-day operation was code-named "Falcon II"; it was preceded by another in November 2020 dubbed "Falcon I," when three alleged SilverTerrier members were arrested for their involvement in BEC scams that compromised [500,000 organizations worldwide](#).

Pete Renals, principal researcher for Unit 42 at Palo Alto Networks, says researchers from the company have been [tracking the Nigerian individual](#) who was arrested recently since at least 2017. He notes that while this person is suspected to be a ringleader, it's hard to say what exactly the individual's role was within SilverTerrier because of the sheer number of people who are part of the group and the amorphous nature of their malicious activities.

"It is difficult to draw boundaries around subgroups or affix certain roles to actors, as these groups are often time-bound, fluid in organization, and the individual role of a specific actor usually evolves over time," Renals says.

A Massive Operation

That said, Unit 42's research shows that the arrested individual likely owned the infrastructure that served as the command- and-control (C2) for malware such as ISRStealer, a keystroke logging tool; Pony, a password stealer; and the LokiBot information stealer, Renals notes.

The security vendor says it also identified more than 240 domains that the threat actor had registered under various aliases. Fifty of those domains were used as C2 infrastructure for malware the threat actors used in their BEC campaigns.

Significantly, the arrested individual provided a street address that belonged to a major US financial institution in NY when registering the domains, Palo Alto Networks said. The same individual also shared social-media connections with at least three of the BEC operators who were previously arrested as part of Operation Falcon II.

The string of arrests since late 2020 has highlighted the growing ability of international law enforcement authorities, cybersecurity vendors, and other stakeholders to work together in tracking down major BEC operators. Even so, BEC remains a major cyberscourge to organizations worldwide.

According to [statistics maintained by the FBI](#), BEC attacks caused a staggering \$43 billion in actual and attempted losses worldwide between June 2016 and last December. In that time frame, there were some 241,200 BEC incidents involving victims in all 50 US states and 177 countries. Approximately 116,400 individuals and organizations in the US reported being targeted by a BEC scam during that period, causing over \$14.7 billion in losses.

Renals says the sheer scope of BEC activity has made it challenging to stop. "The BEC threat landscape is extremely active and constantly evolving," he says. "As a threat type, it has grown over the years to become the most prevalent and costly form of malicious cyber activity targeting our organizations."

While Nigeria has been the center of BEC activity in recent years, there have been similar scams originating from other countries as well, he says. "We also see BEC schemes originate from Malaysia and

	India, and we see facilitation of BEC schemes in most developed nations to include money mules laundering the money from the attacks," Renals says.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/25 GoodWill 'ransomware with a cause'
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/goodwill-ransomware-help-vulnerable/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>'Ransomware with a cause' has been detected in New Delhi, India. The cryptoviral extortion demands that people donate clothing to the homeless, provide children with food in branded pizza shops and offer financial assistance to those in urgent need of medical care.</p> <p>The recent news comes from CloudSEK, a digital risk monitoring firm, which warned that Goodwill ransomware could lead to both temporary and permanent loss of company data. In addition, warned CloudSEK, the ransomware could lead to a complete shutdown of operations and revenue loss.</p> <p>A report from CloudSEK reads, "Our researchers were able to trace the email address, provided by the ransomware group, back to an India-based IT security solutions & services company, that provides end-to-end managed security services."</p> <p>"GoodWill ransomware was identified by CloudSEK researchers in March 2022. As the threat group's name suggests, the operators are allegedly interested in promoting social justice rather than conventional financial reasons."</p> <p>In the event the GoodWill ransomware affects a system, every single document, photo, video, database and file becomes encrypted, after which users can no longer access the data without a decryption key.</p> <p>"The actors suggest that victims perform three socially driven activities in exchange for the decryption key: Donate new clothes to the homeless, record the action and post it on social media; take five less fortunate children to Dominos, Pizza Hut or KFC for a treat, take pictures and videos and post them on social media; and provide financial assistance to anyone who needs urgent medical attention but cannot afford it, at a nearby hospital, record audio, and share it with the operators," continues the report.</p> <p>Should the target carry out these three tasks, the ransomware asks them to share a message on Facebook or Instagram, demonstrating "how you transformed yourself into a kind human being by becoming a victim of a ransomware called GoodWill." Once verified, the person orchestrating this invasive event will reportedly provide those affected with a decryption kit to recover the stolen data.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/25 Port of London website suffers DDoS attack
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/pro-iran-altahrea-hit-port-of-london-website-ddos-attack/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>A seemingly 'politically motivated' DDoS attack knocked down the Port of London authority's website.</p> <p>The Port of London Authority/PLA has become the latest victim of a cyberattack that caused the forced shut down of its website, the company confirmed on Tuesday, May 24th.</p> <p>Check Point Research also confirmed the DDoS attack, citing that an Iranian group launched Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack to shut down the PLA website.</p> <p>The PLA is a public trust that maintains and supervises the Thames Tideway's ups and downs from the Kent/Essex Strait to Teddington Lock towards the North Sea end and oversees 200,000 commercial/leisure vessels.</p> <p>ALtahrea Team Hacking Group Claims Responsibility</p> <p>As per the latest updates, the DDoS attack is politically motivated, and the ALtahrea Team hacking group is responsible for the attack. The group claimed responsibility for the attack on their Telegram channel at 8 pm.</p>

	<p>According to Check Point researchers, ALtahreia is a pro-Iranian hacker gang that previously launched attacks against the Israeli Port Authority, the Israeli 9 channel, the Jpost, and other Israeli entities.</p> <p>The group has also attacked Nasdaq, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan's official website, and the Turkish media platform Anadolu Agency.</p> <p>Researchers claim that apparently, the Iranian government operates this group, and its members are staffed either by Iraqis who support Iran or the Iranian government.</p> <p>Nevertheless, the good news is that at the time of publishing this article, the PLA's website was back online.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/25 New Linux-based ransomware 'Cheerscrypt'
SOURCE	https://www.trendmicro.com/en_us/research/22/e/new-linux-based-ransomware-cheerscrypt-targets-esxi-devices.html?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>We recently observed multiple Linux-based ransomware detections that malicious actors launched to target VMware ESXi servers, a bare-metal hypervisor for creating and running several virtual machines (VMs) that share the same hard drive storage. We encountered Cheerscrypt, a new ransomware family, that has been targeting a customer's ESXi server used to manage VMware files.</p> <p>In the past, ESXi servers were also attacked by other known ransomware families such as LockBit, Hive, and RansomEXX as an efficient way to infect many computers with ransomware.</p> <p>Conclusion</p> <p>ESXi is widely used in enterprise settings for server virtualization. It is therefore a popular target for ransomware attacks. As mentioned, compromising ESXi servers has been a scheme used by some notorious cybercriminal groups because it is a means to swiftly spread the ransomware to many devices. Organizations should thus expect malicious actors to upgrade their malware arsenal and breach as many systems and platforms as they can for monetary gain.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/25 CLOP ransomware activity spiked in April
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/threat-intelligence/clop-ransomware-activity-spiked-in-april?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>While on the whole the ransomware landscape remained fairly stable between March and April, a new analysis shows a sizable hike in attack activity from the CLOP ransomware group.</p> <p>The NCC Group April Threat Pulse update says that the CLOP ransomware group leapfrogged from dead last to the fourth most active group for the month, a 2,100% increase over March.</p> <p>The industrial sector was most targeted in April, suffering 35% of ransomware attacks, followed by consumer cyclicals (19%) and technology (10%), according to NCC.</p> <p>CLOP appears to favor targeting the industrial and technology sector, the researchers warn.</p> <p>"The increase in CLOP's activity seems to suggest they have returned to the threat landscape," Matt Hull, global lead for strategic threat intelligence at NCC Group, said in a statement about the new ransomware group activity findings. "Organizations within CLOP's most targeted sectors — notably industrials and technology — should consider the threat this ransomware group presents, and be prepared for it."</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/25 New ChromeLoader malware surge
----------	---------------------------------------------

SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/new-chromeloader-malware-surge-threatens-browsers-worldwide/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>The ChromeLoader malware is seeing an uptick in detections this month, following a relatively stable volume since the start of the year, causing the browser hijack to become a widespread threat.</p> <p>ChromeLoader is a browser hijacker that can modify the victim's web browser settings to show search results that promote unwanted software, fake giveaways and surveys, and adult games and dating sites.</p> <p>The malware's operators receive financial gains through a system of marketing affiliation by redirecting user traffic to advertising sites.</p> <p>There are many hijackers of this kind, but ChromeLoader stands out for its persistence, volume, and infection route, which involves the aggressive use of PowerShell.</p> <p>Abusing PowerShell</p> <p>According to Red Canary researchers, who have been following the activity of ChromeLoader since February this year, the operators of the hijacker use a malicious ISO archive file to infect their victims.</p> <p>The ISO masquerades as a cracked executable for a game or commercial software, so the victims likely download it themselves from torrent or malicious sites.</p> <p>The researchers have also noticed Twitter posts promoting cracked Android games and offering QR codes that lead to malware-hosting sites.</p> <p>When a person double-clicks on the ISO file in Windows 10 or later, the ISO file will be mounted as a virtual CD-ROM drive. This ISO file contains an executable that pretends to be a game crack or keygen, using names like "CS_Installer.exe."</p> <p>Finally, ChromeLoader executes and decodes a PowerShell command that fetches an archive from a remote resource and loads it as a Google Chrome extension.</p> <p>Once this is done, the PowerShell will remove the scheduled task leaving Chrome infected with a silently injected extension that hijacks the browser and manipulates search engine results.</p> <p>macOS targeted too</p> <p>The operators of ChromeLoader also target macOS systems, looking to manipulate both Chrome and Apple's Safari web browsers.</p> <p>The infection chain on macOS is similar, but instead of ISO, the threat actors use DMG (Apple Disk Image) files, a more common format on that OS.</p> <p>Moreover, instead of the installer executable, the macOS variant uses an installer bash script that downloads and decompresses the ChromeLoader extension onto the "private/var/tmp" directory.</p> <p>"To maintain persistence, the macOS variation of ChromeLoader will append a preference (plist) file to the ~/Library/LaunchAgents directory," explains Red Canary's report.</p> <p>"This ensures that every time a user logs into a graphical session, ChromeLoader's Bash script can continually run."</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/26 China sudden warnings about US hackers
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/china-us-hacking-accusations/
GIST	FOR THE BEST part of a decade, US officials and cybersecurity companies have been naming and shaming hackers they believe work for the Chinese government. These hackers have stolen terabytes of

data from pharmaceutical companies to [video game firms](#), [compromised servers](#), [stripped security protections](#), and [highjacked hacking tools](#), according to security experts. And as [China's alleged hacking has grown in aggression](#), individual Chinese hackers face indictments. However, things may be changing.

Since the start of 2022, there has been a marked uptick in China's Foreign Ministry and the country's cybersecurity firms calling out alleged US cyberespionage. Until now, these allegations have been a rarity. But the disclosures come with a catch: They appear to rely on years-old technical details, which are already publicly known and don't contain fresh information. The move may be a strategic change for China as the nation tussles to cement its position as a tech superpower.

"These are useful materials for China's tit-for-tat propaganda campaigns when they faced US accusation and indictment of China's cyberespionage activities," says Che Chang, a cyber threat analyst at Taiwan-based cybersecurity firm TeamT5.

China's accusations, which were [noted](#) by security journalist Catalin Cimpanu, all follow a very similar pattern. On February 23, Chinese security company Pangu Lab [published](#) allegations that the US National Security Agency's elite [Equation Group](#) hackers used a backdoor, dubbed Bvp47, to monitor 45 countries. The *Global Times*, a tabloid newspaper that's part of China's state-controlled media, ran an [exclusive report](#) on the research. Weeks later, on March 14, the newspaper had a second [exclusive story about another](#) NSA tool, NOPEN, based on details from China's National Computer Virus Emergency Response Center. A week later, Chinese cybersecurity firm Qihoo 360 [alleged](#) that US hackers had been attacking Chinese companies and organizations. And on April 19, the *Global Times* [reported](#) on further National Computer Virus Emergency Response Center findings around HIVE, malware developed by the CIA.

The reports are accompanied with a flurry of statements—often in response to questions from the media—by China's Foreign Ministry spokespeople. "China is gravely concerned over the irresponsible malicious cyber activities of the US government," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin [said](#) in April after one of the announcements. "We urge the US side to explain itself and immediately stop such malicious activities." Over the first nine days of May, Foreign Ministry spokespeople commented on US cyber [activities](#) at least [three times](#). "One cannot whitewash himself by smearing others," Zhao Lijian said in [one instance](#).

While cyber activity undertaken by state actors is often wrapped in highly classified files, many hacking tools developed by the US are no longer a secret. In 2017, WikiLeaks published 9,000 documents in the [Vault7 leaks](#), which detailed many of the CIA's tools. A year earlier, the mysterious [Shadow Brokers](#) hacking group stole data from one of the NSA's elite hacking teams and slowly dripped the data to the world. The Shadow Brokers leaks included dozens of exploits and new [zero-days](#)—including the [Eternal Blue](#) hacking tool, which has since been used repeatedly in some of the [largest cyberattacks](#). Many of the details in the Shadow Brokers leaks match up with details about NSA which were [disclosed by Edward Snowden in 2013](#). (An NSA spokesperson said it has "no comment" for this story; the agency routinely does not comment on its activity.)

Ben Read, director of cyberespionage analysis at US cybersecurity firm Mandiant, says China's state media push of alleged US hacking seems to be consistent, but it mostly contains older information. "Everything that I've seen they've written about, they tie back to the US through either the Snowden leaks or Shadow Brokers," Read says.

Pangu Lab's February report on Bvp47—the only publication on its website—says it initially discovered the details in 2013 but pieced them together after the Shadow Brokers leaks in 2017. "The report was based on a decade-old malware, and the decryption key is the same" as in WikiLeaks, Che says. The details of HIVE and NOPEN have also been available for years. Neither Pangu Labs or Qihoo 360, which has been on the [US government sanctions list since 2020](#), responded to requests for comment on their research or methodology. Although a Pangu spokesperson previously [said](#) it recently published the old details, and it had taken a long time to analyze the data.

Megha Pardhi, a [China researcher](#) at Takshashila Institution, an Indian think tank, says the publications and follow-up comments from officials can serve multiple purposes. Internally, China can use it for propaganda and to send a message to the US that it has the capability to attribute cyber activity. But beyond this, there is a warning to other countries, Pardhi says. “The message is that even though you're allied with the United States, they're still gonna come after you.”

“We oppose and crack down in accordance with law all forms of cyberespionage and attacks,” Liu Pengyu, a spokesperson for the Chinese Embassy in the US, says in a statement. Liu did not respond directly to questions around the apparent uptick in finger-pointing at the US this year, the evidence that was being used to do so, or why this may be happening years after details originally emerged. China is widely considered to be one of the most sophisticated and active state cyber actors—involved in spying, hacking for espionage, and gathering data. [Western officials consider](#) the country to be the biggest cyber threat, ahead of Russia, Iran, and North Korea.

“Recently, there have been many reports of US carrying cyber theft and attacks on China and the whole world,” Liu says in a statement that reflects comments made by China’s Foreign Ministry spokespeople this year. “The US should reflect on itself and join others to jointly safeguard peace and security in cyberspace with a responsible attitude.”

Many of the disclosures in 2022—there are only a [handful of previous Chinese accusations](#) against the US—stem from private cybersecurity companies. This is similar to how Western cybersecurity companies report their findings; they are not always incorporated into government talking points, however, and state-backed media is all but nonexistent.

The potential shift in tactics could play into wider policies around technology use and development. In recent years, China’s policies have focused on positioning itself as a [dominant force in technology standards](#) in everything from 5G to quantum computers. A raft of new [cybersecurity and privacy laws](#) have detailed how companies should handle data and protect national information—including the potential for [hoarding previously unknown vulnerabilities](#).

“One explanation is, possibly, that we are engaged in a kind of ideological—or if you want to put it more prosaically, a marketing—battle with China,” says Suzanne Spaulding, a senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and previously a senior cybersecurity official in the Obama administration. The US-China relationship has been fraught in recent years, with tensions rising over national security issues including concerns of [telecom giant Huawei](#). “China is offering, around the world, a competing model to Western-style democracy,” Spaulding says, noting that China may be responding to Western countries coming together on multiple issues since Russia invaded [Ukraine](#).

In July 2021, China’s Ministry of Industry and Information Technology [published plans](#) to boost the private security industry by 2023. Companies based in China should spend more on their defenses against cyberattacks, the government department said at the time. It also said the whole cybersecurity industry within China should look to grow in size in the coming years, as well as bolster the development of network monitoring systems and threat detection techniques. “What we've started to see over the last couple of years, increasingly, is that companies in China are building their own capabilities,” says Adam Meyers, vice president of intelligence at US cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike. “There's been a few that have waded into the threat intelligence space.”

But publicizing details of the long-known incidents still raises plenty of questions. Mandiant’s Read says he wonders exactly how many cyberespionage cases Chinese companies and authorities are finding. The answer would provide significant clues about their true capabilities. Read says: “Is this 50 percent of what they're finding? Is this 1 percent of what they're finding? Is this 90 percent of what they're finding?”

The move appears to be strategic, says TeamT5’s Che. “Considering the close relationship between China's cybersecurity firms and the Chinese government, our team surmises that these reports could be a part of China’s strategic distraction when they are accused of massive surveillance systems and espionage operations.”

Terror Conditions

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Turkey officials: new ISIS leader captured
SOURCE	https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-05-26/turkey-has-detained-islamic-state-s-new-leader-officials-say
GIST	<p>Senior Turkish officials said Islamic State's new leader has been captured in a recent raid in Istanbul.</p> <p>Anti-terrorism police and intelligence agents detained a man they believe has led the jihadist group since its previous chief was killed in a US operation in Syria in February, the officials said, asking not to be identified because of the sensitivity of the matter.</p> <p>Turkish news website OdaTV identified the arrested man as Abu al-Hassan al-Qurayshi without saying how it obtained the information. Previous reports have given a similar name for the new Islamic State leader.</p> <p>Bloomberg News couldn't independently verify the identity of the man detained by Turkish authorities.</p> <p>President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been informed of his capture, the officials said Thursday. He's expected to announce the arrest in the coming days, OdaTV said.</p> <p>The officials said the terrorist leader was captured following lengthy police surveillance of a house where he was staying. OdaTV said police didn't open fire during the raid.</p> <p>Turkish forces have clashed with Islamic State militants at home and in neighboring Syria over recent years, ousting the jihadist fighters from several towns near Turkey's border.</p> <p>News of the detention also came as Ankara is signaling plans for a fresh operation into Syrian territory to confront Kurdish YPG forces backed by the US but viewed as terrorists by Turkey for their links to an autonomy-seeking militant group at home.</p> <p>The YPG received western support as one of the most effective forces fighting to dismantle the Islamic State caliphate.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/26 Rise, fall environmentalist underground ELF
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/26/magazine/earth-liberation-front-joseph-mahmoud-dibee.html
GIST	<p>Late one summer evening in 2018, an American citizen named Joseph Mahmoud Dibee was sitting in José Martí International Airport in Havana, Cuba — trying, unsuccessfully, to sleep — when he was approached by three men. Dibee, a civil engineer, was in Havana on a layover. After a long business trip in Ecuador, he was heading home to Russia, where he lived with his wife and stepson. The men demanded his passport, then led him out of the terminal and into a waiting sedan. Dibee asked where they were going, but got no response. Sandwiched between his captors, he was driven miles through the night before finally arriving at what appeared to be a jail.</p> <p>For the next three days, Dibee would claim in a subsequent court filing, he was imprisoned without explanation and, in effect, tortured. His small concrete cell was open to the elements; during the day, the cage baked. As Dibee, who was then 50, sweat through his clothes, the jail's guards gave him little to drink. He soon became nauseated and began to repeatedly pass out. With no way of contacting his family, Dibee worried that, if he died, they would never learn what happened to him.</p>

On his fourth day of confinement, weak from dehydration, Dibee was dragged to an air-conditioned trailer in another part of the facility. He was met by a middle-aged man in fatigues who identified himself as an officer in Cuba's state intelligence service. Smiling, the officer held up a bottle of water.

"But first," he said, "tell us about the fires."

Several days later, on Aug. 9, 2018, Cuban authorities handed Dibee, in shackles, over to agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. To the F.B.I., Dibee's arrest marked the end of a decade-long manhunt for one of the agency's most wanted domestic terrorists. In 2006, Dibee was indicted on a charge of participation in a series of arsons carried out by a shadowy band of environmental activists known as the Earth Liberation Front. In the late 1990s, the ELF became notorious for setting fire to symbols of ecological destruction, including timber mills, an S.U.V. dealership and a ski resort. The group, which warned of imminent ecological catastrophe, was widely demonized. Its exploits were condemned by mainstream environmental groups, ridiculed by the media and inspired a furious crackdown from law enforcement.

Fleeing before he could be arrested, Dibee had spent years as a fugitive in Syria, Russia and Mexico, until he was picked up passing through Havana. After his interrogation by the Cuban authorities, the F.B.I. flew him in a Gulfstream jet to Portland, Ore., where he was arraigned for charges relating to his role in the attacks. [This April, Dibee pleaded guilty to arson](#) and conspiracy to commit arson.

The plea comes at a moment when the story of the Earth Liberation Front seems more relevant than ever. After decades in which America's environmental movement confined its activities largely to rallies, marches and other lawful forms of protest, frustrated activists have begun taking a more confrontational approach. Younger groups like the Sunrise Movement and Extinction Rebellion have blockaded roads and occupied the offices of lawmakers. During the Standing Rock protests of 2016, thousands of demonstrators sought to physically impede construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. Tim DeChristopher, a founder of the Climate Disobedience Center, which supports protesters who engage in nonviolent resistance, told me that, in the 2000s, such direct action was championed mostly by a fringe group of anarchists. (DeChristopher himself was sent to prison after placing winning bids at public auctions for oil and gas leases and then refusing to pay.) Now, even staid Washington-based environmental groups, sensing an increasingly unruly mood among their base, have slowly started to embrace more radical tactics. In 2017, the Sierra Club formally lifted its 120-year ban on civil disobedience after its executive director and other senior members were arrested for strapping themselves to a gate outside the White House.

Recently, some climate activists have begun to openly contemplate the possibility — in their eyes, the necessity — of directly sabotaging the infrastructure of the carbon economy. Foremost among them is the academic Andreas Malm, whose recent book, ["How to Blow Up a Pipeline,"](#) calls for smashing the tools of fossil-fuel extraction as a last-ditch means of averting ecological collapse. In interviews with mainstream outlets such as [Vox](#) and [The New Yorker](#), Malm contends that climate activists should give up their dogmatic attachment to pacifism and start to destroy the machines that actually produce carbon. While acknowledging that such attacks might fail, Malm nevertheless argues that the urgency of global warming — in the 16 years since Dibee's indictment, the world has collectively pumped about 500 billion more tons of carbon into the atmosphere — demands new tactics. "I think that the situation is so dire, so extreme," he told Vox, "that we have to experiment."

This summer in Oregon, Dibee will be sentenced by Judge Ann Aiken. The prosecution is recommending a sentence of more than seven years, as well as a yet-to-be-determined amount of financial restitution. When Dibee and his lawyers plead for leniency, Aiken may hear some of the largely forgotten history of the ELF — how a small group of activists, fueled by idealism and rage, brought the entire weight of the federal government down upon themselves, severely curtailing what remained of the radical environmental movement in this country. As climate change, no longer an abstraction, has begun to transform American life in the form of heat, fire, floods and smoke, it is a story that may sound different to some listeners now than when prosecutors first told it.

The series of events that would ultimately lead to Dibee's capture by federal authorities began 30-odd years ago, when a bookish teenager named Kevin Tubbs was leafing through the *Utne Reader* and came across an ad for the National Anti-Vivisection Society. Curious, he wrote away requesting a pamphlet. When it arrived a few weeks later, Tubbs was horrified. Animals, he learned, were being routinely tortured in the name of science. The photos he was able to find — dogs with their faces sliced open, rats butchered alive, monkeys screaming at the electrodes implanted in their abdomens — seemed like windows into hell. Tubbs's family lived on the outskirts of Omaha, a few miles from the stockyards. On some nights, when the wind drifted south, he could smell the cattle, their dung giving off a lush, loamy scent. He read that mother cows sobbed when separated from their calves, and it occurred to him that he was living next to the infrastructure of atrocity.

Tubbs went vegetarian, then vegan, and was soon a full-time activist, getting regularly arrested at protests. But Tubbs wasn't naïve about what such demonstrations could realistically accomplish. Seeking a new approach, he applied for an editor position at the *Earth First! Journal*, an environmental newsletter in Eugene, Ore. His application included a copy of his rap sheet; he was hired immediately. The organization that ran the journal was founded a decade and a half earlier, in 1980, by a group of activists who became disaffected with the professionalized, incrementalist approach of the environmental establishment, embodied by groups like the Sierra Club. They were, in other words, radical environmentalists. The radicals believed the modest reforms pursued through traditional legislative channels simply weren't sufficient to save the planet from ecological annihilation.

By the mid-90s, the city of Eugene had become an incubator of political dissent and a gathering place for radical and militant environmentalists. In the working-class Whiteaker neighborhood, anarchists had regular battles with cops. To the east, the land turned primeval, with millions of acres of ancient forest spread across the vast Cascade mountain range. While some Eugene residents earned their incomes off timber, others were drawn by the song of the trees.

In Eugene, Tubbs met a man named Jacob Ferguson. Ferguson wore all black and was covered in piercings and tattoos, including an ornate pentagram on his head. A vagabond, freshly sober from heroin, Ferguson had recently settled in Eugene with his pregnant girlfriend. Tubbs detected something gentle beneath Ferguson's piratical exterior, and the two men soon became inseparable.

In 1991, an unknown arsonist set fire to a portion of the vast Willamette National Forest, not far outside town. The blaze burned for two weeks, destroying about 9,000 acres, much of it old-growth firs, in the Warner Creek watershed. There were no suspects, but among activists, suspicion fell on the local timber industry. While most old-growth forest was protected from logging, a loophole in federal law meant partly burned sections were fair game. After the fire, the U.S. Forest Service — the agency that coordinates the sale of national forests to industry — prepared to sell the scorched acreage to logging companies, who would "salvage" the remaining trees. Activists persuaded a court to grant an injunction against the sale. But then, in 1995, President Bill Clinton signed a bill suspending protection for Willamette and hundreds of other forests, opening them to logging.

Dozens of incensed activists, including Tubbs and Ferguson, took to the mountains in hopes of physically defending the wilderness. Whenever logging trucks tried to approach the old-growth trees, the protesters jumped into the road and handcuffed themselves to barrels filled with concrete. As the campaign stretched on, the activists built a small settlement near Warner Creek, digging trenches and erecting a fort with a working drawbridge. Tubbs occasionally occupied a towering 20-foot structure ingeniously constructed by a fellow protester who had also found his way to the Cascades — Joseph Dibee.

Like Tubbs's, Dibee's environmentalism was rooted in an adolescent wounding. Dibee had been a shy child who suffered from asthma. His parents moved to the United States from Syria before he was born, and until he was 8 he spoke only Arabic. His father, an avid outdoorsman, would lead him into the mountains, where they'd forage for mushrooms. On one of these trips, Dibee's father took him to a small, sunlit meadow, with a creek, secreted away in an obscure corner of the forest. He began hiking up to the spot by himself, for the tranquillity — a sensitive boy's inviolable retreat. And then, one day, when Dibee

arrived at his sanctuary, he saw it was gone. A vast plot of trees had been felled for timber, leaving the scalp of the ancient forest with a bald patch, as if shaved by a colossal razor.

Surviving on donated food and braving a glacial winter that buried their tents in snow, the occupiers lasted almost a year. It ended when the Clinton administration issued new restrictions on logging in national forests, saving Warner Creek. While most local activists took the occupation as an unmitigated success, to Tubbs the victory felt empty. At that point, he was 26 and had been trying to make substantive change for nearly a decade — letter-writing, leafleting, canvassing, tabling, teach-ins, lawsuits, blockades, boycotts, vigils, pickets, rallies, even guerrilla street theater. And yet nothing seemed to be getting better.

A few months after Warner Creek wrapped up, the Earth First! Journal received and published a mysterious message. It was from an entity calling itself the Earth Liberation Front. The ELF was said to be a clandestine, leaderless group, dedicated to aggressive vandalism in the name of the environment. The first cell of “Elves” had recently popped up in Britain, followed by others on the European continent. The missive to the journal was a call to arms, inviting its American readers to “allow those who are destroying this planet to be witness to some of the most destructive eco-sabotage and criminal damage ever seen, persuading them to either give up their practices or suffer the consequences!!!”

In the predawn hours of Oct. 28, 1996, a newspaper carrier for The Salem Statesman Journal was making his rounds when he passed a federal ranger station in the forest near the town of Detroit, Ore., and noticed that a truck in the parking lot was on fire. The blaze was easily contained, but a worker later discovered, on the station’s roof, a milk jug filled with fuel that had failed to ignite. On one of the station’s walls, someone had spray-painted the phrase “Earth Liberation Front.”

Two nights later, a group consisting of Tubbs, Ferguson and, federal prosecutors claim, a midwife named Josephine Overaker drove to a second ranger station near a town called Oakridge. At the station, Ferguson placed a gasoline canister inside a dumpster and a second canister next to its eastern wall, before igniting them with incense sticks. Sprinting back to his borrowed Subaru, he scattered nails in the driveway to slow down firefighters. Before returning the car to his friend, Ferguson changed the tires, throwing away the old ones to prevent the treads from being traced. By daybreak, the Oakridge Ranger Station had burned to the ground.

The arson threw Eugene’s environmental community into an uproar. Small-scale sabotage, like pouring sugar into a bulldozer’s gas tank, had always been part of radical-environmentalist culture. But arson was something different. Besides destroying the structure itself — an estimated \$5 million loss — the fire also consumed decades of forest-related data collected by naturalists and biologists. The fire blazed so hot that, weeks after the attack, when the staff opened a safe, admitting oxygen, papers stored inside burst into flames. Many activists felt that, while the U.S. Forest Service might be complicit with the timber industry, the arson squandered much of the good will generated by the Warner Creek victory. The Sierra Club offered a reward for information that led to the arsonists’ capture.

Committing himself completely to ecological sabotage, Tubbs quit his aboveground activism and took a job at a market-research company. Many of Tubbs’s companions in ELF actions were veterans of Warner Creek, including Joseph Dibee, whose technical expertise made him an invaluable ally. After months of planning, on July 21, 1997, the Elves gathered in the Oregon desert several miles from the Cavel West Horse Rendering Plant. Every year, under a little-known federal program, thousands of wild horses were rounded up by the Bureau of Land Management and purchased, sometimes by buyers who would go on to sell them for slaughter. Cavel West killed as many as 500 horses a week, shipping the meat to Europe. For years, locals had complained about the plant — its sickening smell, the screams of the horses and the vast amount of blood it generated, which would sometimes overwhelm the sewer system and burble up through storm drains. While Tubbs manned a police scanner in their getaway van, the rest of the team trudged through the night toward the plant, dressed in dark clothing and communicating with two-way radios. According to a court filing by the prosecution, Dibee drilled holes in the facility’s walls, filled the hollows with a mixture of glycerin soap, diesel and gasoline — the group called this “vegan Jell-O” — and set timed igniters. After the plant was in flames, and before going their separate ways, everyone threw their clothes in a hole and doused them in acid.

A week later, Craig Rosebraugh, a vegan baker in Portland, found an odd-looking note in the mailbox of an activist group where he volunteered. The letter — which appeared to have been written with deliberate sloppiness — denounced the Cavel West plant's role in horse slaughter and claimed its destruction was the work of a new group of radical environmentalists. Believing the group wanted their message shared with the world, Rosebraugh released it to the media. For years, he would receive regular communications from the ELF, eventually becoming a kind of spokesman for the group. In subsequent communiqués, which mixed doom-laden prophecies of ecological disaster with furious demands for change, the group described its ethos in greater detail. "We are the burning rage of this dying planet," began one, which was posted to the internet. "The war of greed ravages the Earth and species die out every day. ELF works to speed up the collapse of industry, to scare the rich and undermine the foundations of the state." Property destruction, they explained, was a way of levying a kind of fine on despoiling nature — of, in effect, removing the profit motive from killing the planet — and arson was the simplest, cheapest method of extracting this tax.

ELF cells would eventually spread all over the country, but the Eugene group was the first and easily the most prolific. The group's methods were low-tech, but the precautions they took to avoid being caught were exhaustive. Security culture was big in Eugene, where activists were well versed in the government's infiltration of older radical movements. The group used email "dead drops," a system that involved exchanging coded messages in the Drafts folder. Arsons were called "BBQs," timing devices "hamburgers." Supplies were purchased in cash or shoplifted, and, before every action, tools were scrubbed with ammonia to remove any genetic material. The Elves intentionally avoided socializing — many members, in fact, never met each other. The Eugene cell took pains to be less a formal organization than a loose collection of actions with an overlapping cast of activists. The Elves also adopted aliases to keep their identities secret. A couple of members had a romantic relationship that lasted years, during which they never learned each other's real names.

In the fall of 1998, the ELF took on its largest target. A resort in the mountains of Vail, Colo., was planning to clear more than 800 acres of forest to make way for new ski runs and roads, threatening the habitat of the Canada lynx. A coalition of environmental groups, including the Sierra Club, had fought the expansion in court but were denied an injunction to stop the logging. With the help of a young woman named Chelsea Gerlach, another Elf named William Rodgers devised a plan. On the night of Oct. 18, 1998, just before the logging was scheduled to begin, Rodgers ran across the mountain ridge, setting fire to the resort's buildings and ski lifts one by one. Soon, eight structures were aflame. There would have been nine, but Rodgers skipped a cabin after peeking inside and finding two sleeping hunters. Rodgers and Gerlach then drove to a library in Denver where Gerlach emailed Rosebraugh an anonymous communiqué. The resort had been destroyed, she explained, on behalf of the lynx.

Detective Greg Harvey's first day with the Eugene Police Department's Special Investigations Unit ended with a riot. It was June 18, 1999, and a march through downtown Eugene, led by hundreds of anarchists, escalated into mayhem when protesters began smashing windows and police officers responded with tear gas. The S.I.U. was founded specifically to address the threats posed by radical groups, whose crimes often required complex investigations. Since its inception in the 1970s, the S.I.U. had pursued student leftists, outlaw motorcycle gangs and white supremacists. In the 1990s, its focus shifted to crimes committed by the anarchist and radical environmental movements. When the arsons in Oregon began, the S.I.U. joined a working group with a half-dozen other law-enforcement agencies, including the F.B.I. and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, to crack the case. Authorities were convinced it was only a matter of time before the fires accidentally killed someone or the perpetrators escalated to deadly violence.

Harvey and his colleagues began by establishing a network of confidential informants among the radical environmentalists. But who was behind the ELF was just as much a mystery to the activist community as it was to the police, so Harvey decided to go undercover. As he attended gatherings of college students and crust punks in the Whiteaker neighborhood, wearing a dirty wig from a Halloween costume of Jesus, he gradually assembled a map of the activist community. He scoured anarchist zines, trying to learn everything he could about the tenets of radical environmentalism.

The F.B.I. had promised swift justice for Vail, but a year on, the case had stalled. Agency analysts had tried monitoring the phone traffic of activists, seeing who was calling whom, on the assumption the ELF could be taken down like a drug gang. But as Harvey — who had grudgingly come to admire the Elves' discipline — expected, this yielded next to nothing. Harvey's counterpart at the F.B.I., Special Agent John Ferreira, was also getting frustrated. A minor legend within the Bureau, Ferreira had worked cases involving the Bonnano crime family and the Japanese Yakuza. And from the beginning, Ferreira had been fixated on one suspect: Josephine Overaker.

During a routine canvas after the Detroit arson, police had discovered Overaker's address book in a nearby phone booth. Further suspicion fell on Overaker after she was arrested in Tacoma for shoplifting sponges — an ingredient in several of the ELF's devices — shortly before a nearby fire. Investigators had noticed Overaker at protests, and Ferreira became convinced she was involved in Vail. Yet all his evidence was still circumstantial, and after several years, the ELF was beginning to look uncatchable. As Ferreira put it to one reporter, "They kicked our butts."

The ELF, meanwhile, was facing its own setbacks. Vail had made them a household name — the attack even became a plot point on "The West Wing." But a feeling was simmering within the group that they weren't accomplishing much. The fires failed to spark a larger social movement. While the media focused on the spectacle of the fires, it mostly ignored the reasons they were lit. Some targets were being rebuilt with insurance money. More than that, the arsons didn't seem to have had an impact on the financial calculations of the industries they had targeted.

William Rodgers, who was a particularly outspoken and influential member of the group, decided the ELF needed to scale up. He set about recruiting more members, and the Eugene cell soon doubled in size. Rodgers also started to hold meetings — called "book clubs" — intended to spread the group's methods. Rodgers, along with a quiet man named Stan Meyerhoff, wrote and published a manual for building incendiary devices, and posted it to the internet. But as the cell expanded and took on more actions, it began to lose some of its original discipline. In May 1999, during an attack on a meat company in Eugene, someone placed an incendiary device next to a natural-gas line, risking an immense explosion. In September 2000, several members of the group tried, unsuccessfully, to set fire to a Eugene police substation, a target bearing little obvious connection to the environment. A few months later, a team torched Superior Lumber in Glendale, Ore., issuing a communiqué that labeled the timber company a "typical Earth raper." The arson gave some Elves pause. Superior was a small, family-owned business and its town's biggest employer. Such an action seemed unlikely to win much sympathy.

These disagreements underscored a contradiction in the ELF's approach, namely that the group saw itself as the vanguard of a revolution, when in fact it was all alone. As Andreas Malm notes, many largely peaceful social movements have, in the past, included a radical flank that engaged in more aggressive tactics. Indeed, some movements that are now all but universally admired involved more violence and property destruction than we like to remember. Suffragists smashed windows. During the Civil Rights era, Black residents of segregated Northern cities burned down buildings. Even Nelson Mandela, as head of the militant wing of the African National Congress, took part in a campaign of bombing unoccupied government buildings. Yet all were wedded to larger political movements, with specific aims, for which sabotage was but one form of pressure. The ELF's fires, Malm has observed, existed in a political void.

The ELF disdained the mainstream Washington-based environmental groups, and the feeling seemed to be mutual. Many, including Greenpeace, the World Wildlife Fund and the Sierra Club — which offered cash rewards on several occasions for information leading to the capture of eco-saboteurs — made statements denouncing property destruction. The executive director of Greenpeace USA declared that peaceful civil disobedience was a cornerstone of the organization's philosophy, citing Nelson Mandela as a model.

On June 16, 2000, two activists, Jeffrey Luers and Craig Marshall, set fire to three pickup trucks at the Romania Chevrolet dealership in Eugene, unaware they were being tailed by Detective Greg Harvey. The two men were arrested, with Marshall pleading guilty and Luers going to trial. As a show of solidarity, the Elves decided to strike Romania a second time. On March 30, 2001, a small crew crept into the dealership in the middle of the night. While Rodgers waited in a van and Tubbs stood lookout, Stan Meyerhoff and

another ELF member placed kitty-litter pans under the vehicles and filled them with fuel, linking them together with gasoline-soaked linens scored from thrift stores. By dawn, 35 S.U.V.s had been torched. A communiqué dedicated the action to Luers.

The ELF's arson seemed to have an unforeseen effect. Luers was found guilty and, for the crime of setting fire to three trucks and another attempted arson, received a sentence of more than 22 years, the longest ever handed down for what was then a relatively new concept: eco-terrorism. For years, the phrase "eco-terrorism" had more often been used to describe violence against the natural world than vandalism committed in its name. When Saddam Hussein dumped millions of gallons of oil into the Persian Gulf, President George H.W. Bush denounced it as an act of "environmental terrorism." Yet, by the mid-90s, conservatives had begun warning of the eco-terrorism perpetrated by radical environmentalists. News outlets, including The New York Times, regularly described the ELF as terrorists — despite the fact, as activists pointed out, that the ELF had never killed anyone.

Some members of the Eugene cell, wanting retribution, doubled down. Early on May 21, 2001, Elves torched two structures and 18 vehicles on a tree farm in Clatskanie, Ore. That same night, 150 miles north, flames devoured an office building on the University of Washington's campus in Seattle. The ELF's communiqué explained that the motive for the twin attacks was the "ecological nightmare" of genetic engineering. But the arsons were based on false information; neither target was nearly as involved in G.M.O. research as the Elves believed.

These misadventures widened rifts, ideological and personal, that had been slowly growing within the group. With early idealism wearing off, it became clear that not everyone in the group believed the same things about why they were setting fires. The Elves had initially agreed on the necessity of a new tactic, but when it became clear the tactic wasn't working, their philosophical differences became insurmountable. At a "book club" meeting soon after the double arson, one attendee raised the possibility of escalating to physical violence, even assassinations. Others — who had joined the ELF because of its commitment to preserving life — were repulsed. On Sept. 5, 2001, after a disagreement with an Elf over an unapproved edit to a communiqué, Rosebraugh stepped down as the group's putative spokesman.

A week later, Chelsea Gerlach was sitting in a hotel room, preparing to reconnoiter a potential target, when she saw on TV that a pair of planes had crashed into the World Trade Center. Hours after the towers fell, Representative Don Young, a Republican from Alaska, suggested there was "a strong possibility" that radical environmentalists were behind the hijackings.

The attacks transformed the F.B.I. overnight. The bureau had been founded in the early 20th century as a law-enforcement agency, but after Sept. 11, its central mission, underwritten by expansive new congressional funding, became counterterrorism. Over the next few years, the F.B.I. turned ever more attention to property destruction committed by environmental activists. While most of this pressure was directed toward radical environmentalists, it also opened terrorism investigations into members of mainstream groups like Greenpeace and PETA for their potential involvement in ecological sabotage. In 2002, James Jarboe, chief of the F.B.I.'s domestic-terrorism division, declared to Congress that the investigation of animal rights extremists and eco-terrorists was the bureau's highest domestic-terrorism priority. This period in the environmental movement — marked by aggressive police tactics and tough new punishments for crimes ostensibly committed in defense of the earth — was one that some activists would come to call the Green Scare.

Exactly why the F.B.I. made eco-terrorism a central concern remains a subject of debate. Some have speculated it was because of corporate pressure. According to the reporting by The Intercept, industry trade groups had been directly pushing the Justice Department to pursue eco-sabotage cases since the 1980s. Yet F.B.I. officials contend that the fixation on the ELF stemmed, in part, from the trauma of Sept. 11. Fearful of being blindsided a second time, the bureau sought to make up for the failure of imagination that had led them to miss signs of an imminent attack from Al Qaeda. There was a conviction that, even if the ELF had so far only targeted buildings, it was just a matter of time before the group began attacking people.

“The question after Sept. 11,” James Jarboe told me, “was ‘Who else wants body bags?’”

By early 2003, the leads had dried up in the ELF investigation. The group had been quiet for almost two years, and the main person of interest, Overaker, was off the grid. It was then that Kirk Engdall, a federal prosecutor in Eugene, decided to try a new strategy. Engdall, who was assigned to the Justice Department’s domestic-terrorism squad, had been obsessed with the ELF case for years. On his wall, he kept a poster of the burning Oakridge Ranger Station. Instead of casting a wide net, Engdall suggested, why not take a meticulous “cold case” approach to a single arson, one that occurred just blocks from his office: Romania Chevrolet.

For the next six months, investigators turned over every clue related to the S.U.V. fires, looking for anything they had missed. Finally, they noticed something unusual. The day after the Romania fire, an activist known as Sparrow had walked into a Eugene police station and asked for an incident report about the arson. Told it was confidential, she then asked for a second report, concerning a stolen truck, taken on the night of the fire. This was a red flag: Investigators assumed a truck had been used to haul fuel for the arson. The second report, about the stolen truck, had been filed by a woman who suggested that the theft had been committed by her neighbor — a man named Jacob Ferguson. (Investigators believed that Sparrow requested the reports in order to figure out how much the police knew.) John Ferreira, meanwhile, had long been interested in Ferguson because of a woman he had dated: Josephine Overaker.

With Ferguson now their main suspect, investigators sought evidence linking him to Romania. For the next six months, Harvey, still in his Jesus-wig disguise, followed Ferguson constantly, up to 14 hours a day. Ferreira and Engdall brought Ferguson in for questioning and presented him with evidence that he had perjured himself when speaking to federal investigators — he’d claimed not to know Overaker — which carried a five-year penalty. According to Harvey, they also bluffed, hinting they had enough evidence to charge him for arson and send him to prison for a long time. Still, Ferguson resisted. The investigators knew that Ferguson had a son born during the Warner Creek occupation, and they knew that his father had spent time in prison when Ferguson was a child. Did he really want his own son to grow up without a dad?

In 2004, Ferguson made a plea deal: little to no jail time in exchange for full cooperation. The government also agreed to pay for heroin-addiction treatment. At the time, investigators still didn’t know the extent of Ferguson’s involvement in the ELF. When Ferguson told them he had participated in over a dozen arsons, they were stunned. (The Romania S.U.V. arson, in fact, was one of the few in which Ferguson played no role.) Investigators were surprised again when Ferguson started naming his associates, most of whom they had never heard of. Harvey assumed Ferguson’s colleagues would be like him — in a word, “punks” — not college-educated people with jobs.

After Ferguson came on board, the F.B.I. designated the ELF investigation a major case, branding it Operation Backfire, freeing up more money and resources. Dozens of agents were soon working the case, with President Bush said to be receiving regular briefings on their progress. Ferguson also reluctantly agreed to wear a wire, and the agency started flying him around the country, arranging for him to bump into his former ELF colleagues, most of whom had moved away. Ferguson soon showed up in Portland, where Chelsea Gerlach worked as a D.J., and a college in Virginia, where Stan Meyerhoff was taking engineering classes. The one person who Ferguson refused to tape, at first, was Kevin Tubbs. It would be, he told investigators, like betraying a sibling. Harvey and Ferreira tried to assure Ferguson he was doing the right thing. They also reminded him he’d only received immunity in exchange for full cooperation.

The arrests happened in two main waves, the first in December 2005, the second a month later. In total, 19 Elves were charged in connection with 20 incidents, causing over \$40 million in damage. In the indictments, prosecutors referred to the group ominously as “The Family,” a name, with its mobbish and Mansonian connotations, that was seldom, if ever, used by the ELF. The F.B.I. director, Robert Mueller, announced the arrests at a televised news conference. “Terrorism is terrorism,” Mueller said, “no matter what the motive.”

The backlash against environmental sabotage, meanwhile, was continuing to intensify. In 2006, the House of Representatives passed a bill that meant environmental activists could spend up to 20 years in prison for property destruction, based on language provided by the American Legislative Exchange Council, or ALEC, a group known for drafting laws with the input of major industries and lobbying for them in Congress. Later that year, a version of the bill passed the Senate with bipartisan support. By 2007, 30 state legislatures had passed statutes specifically addressing eco-terrorism, many also drafted by ALEC. Republicans used the attacks to scold and chasten mainstream environmentalists.

At his sentencing in 2007, Tubbs began by apologizing for his role in the fires. He had come to realize, he told the court, that arson was both reckless and politically ineffective. But, Tubbs continued, the ELF was born of desperation. Mass extinction, deforestation, eroding soils and melting ice shelves — climate change, he said, would soon bring with it an Old Testament plague of droughts and floods. The actions he had taken, Tubbs acknowledged, were wrong, but they were also a reprieve from overwhelming feelings of hopelessness, despair and cynicism. More than that, though, the fires, he said, were lit to raise an alarm about the state of the world.

“It’s as if the ecological destruction and the cataclysmic events that follow it are a huge train bearing down on us, and we are asleep on the tracks,” Tubbs said, in tears. “I was just trying to do my part to help wake us up.”

Tubbs was sentenced to 12 years, seven months in prison. Chelsea Gerlach was sentenced to nine years. William Rodgers, meanwhile, ended his life while awaiting trial. Despite being the second person to cooperate, Stan Meyerhoff received the longest sentence, 13 years. The indictments also tore apart Eugene’s tight-knit environmentalist community. Activists had screaming fights about whether the Elves who spoke to investigators merited sympathy or shunning. The Earth First! Journal started — and still maintains — a website listing the case’s informants, including Tubbs, a former editor. The radical environmental movement slowly disintegrated. Operation Backfire was a resounding success.

On the day of the arrests in 2005, Joseph Dibee was served with a grand-jury subpoena. The F.B.I. asked him to come in, outlined the case they were mounting against him and asked him to help with their investigation. Dibee declined. Instead, prosecutors claim, Dibee enlisted a friend to drive him to Mexico. From there, Dibee flew to Beirut, then on to Syria. Several other Elves also fled the country before they could be arrested.

For more than a decade, Dibee was listed as one of the F.B.I.’s most wanted domestic terrorists. Yet, even in hiding, he continued with his environmental advocacy. In Syria, Dibee taught environmental engineering at a university while helping plan a national project on renewable energy. As the Syrian civil war escalated, Dibee fled to Russia, where he married and started a business recycling used fuels into biodiesel. When Dibee was finally arrested, he was coming home from the jungles of Ecuador, where he had agreed to build an ecologically friendly device for mining gold. By then, most of his fellow fugitives had already been caught. Even Jacob Ferguson ended up in prison, for heroin possession. Only Josephine Overaker remains at large.

Through his lawyer, Dibee first agreed to speak with me about his case, but later changed his mind. By way of explanation, he forwarded a link to a short New York Times story from 2009 with the headline “Fugitive Still Licensed to Fly by the F.A.A.” The Times article noted that, although the F.B.I. had accused Dibee of being a domestic terrorist and was offering a \$50,000 reward for information leading to his capture, he still held a valid U.S. pilot’s license. After the story ran, the F.A.A. revoked it. Last year, after catching Covid while in federal custody, Dibee was conditionally released on house arrest.

When I knocked on his door in Seattle, Dibee stepped briefly outside, and again politely but firmly declined to talk. Standing on his porch, Dibee looked worn down. His two years in jail had overlapped with the summer of 2020, and the protests over George Floyd’s murder had come right to his front door. One day, as Dibee was taken to the federal courthouse in downtown Portland to review documents for his case, the clashes outside became so intense that police deployed tear gas. Whether the demonstrations — and the vast amount of property destroyed in Floyd’s name — led to any substantive political change is a

	<p>question that will be debated for decades. For Dibee, the immediate effect was that the tear gas triggered his asthma.</p> <p>That same summer, while Dibee was in lockup, 3,000 square miles of Oregon and Washington were burned by wildfires. The infernos consumed over 4,000 homes and other structures, including a cattle ranch, a gas station and a timber mill — precisely the kind of symbols of environmental degradation that the Earth Liberation Front had targeted. Now, though, there was no one to take credit, no one to hunt down, no one to put behind bars.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/25 Brooklyn man convicted of backing ISIS
SOURCE	https://nypost.com/2022/05/25/brooklyn-resident-mirsad-kandic-convicted-of-backing-isis/
GIST	<p>A Brooklyn man who became a high-ranking member of ISIS was convicted of supporting the terrorist organization by recruiting members, pushing propaganda and smuggling weapons into Syria, federal prosecutors announced Wednesday.</p> <p>Mirsad Kandic, 40, was found guilty of conspiracy and providing material support to ISIS Tuesday after a three-week trial in Brooklyn federal court. He faces up to life in prison at his sentencing on Nov. 9.</p> <p>Kandic is responsible for recruiting thousands of Westerners to fight in Syria and the Middle East, including Australian teenager and suicide bomber Jake Bilardi, who killed himself, more than 30 Iraqi soldiers and a policeman in Ramadi, Iraq, on March 11, 2015, officials allege.</p> <p>Kandic left Brooklyn in 2013, sneaking into Syria and joining ISIS. His travel to the Middle East had been thwarted twice previously as early as 2012, by authorities who had placed him on a no-fly list, according to the Brooklyn US Attorney's Office.</p> <p>Prosecutors said Kandic first began fighting on the ground using AK-47s and PK machine guns in the ISIS stronghold on the outskirts of Aleppo.</p> <p>Kandic traveled from Brooklyn to Syria to join ISIS in 2013.</p> <p>He then moved to Turkey, where he began helping to smuggle foreign fighters and weapons into Syria and heading ISIS media there — including running more than 120 Twitter accounts with the purpose of attracting new recruits and spreading gruesome propaganda, the feds said.</p> <p>Kandic also gave battlefield intelligence and maps to the terror group commanders and fighters. He helped dig tunnels under the Turkey-Syria border that moved nearly 1,000 fighters, prosecutors say.</p> <p>He also managed money for ISIS fighters and smuggled weapons into Syria, prosecutors say.</p> <p>Kandic worked for ISIS in the Middle East from 2013 until he was arrested in Bosnia in 2017. He was extradited to the US in November that year.</p> <p>“Kandic was a high-ranking member of ISIS who recruited countless fanatics, helping them travel to Syria and other territories to become ISIS fighters,” Brooklyn US Attorney Breon Peace said in a statement. “In addition to fueling the front lines of the ISIS army, the defendant aided the extremist group in many other ways, including by providing weapons and spreading its violent propaganda across the globe, to further its bloody and brutal terrorist campaign.”</p> <p>“Kandic’s actions were directly linked to attacks and significant loss of life,” Peace said.</p> <p>Kandic’s criminal defense attorneys didn’t immediately return a request for comment.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/26 Taliban morality police target women
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/05/26/afghanistan-women-taliban-vice-virtue/
GIST	<p>KABUL — As Abdullah Obeid and his team boarded a bus in central Kabul, female passengers lowered their gaze and hurriedly adjusted headscarves to cover their faces. Obeid, a member of the Taliban’s morality police, was leading a patrol to enforce a recent ruling requiring Afghan women to fully cover in public.</p> <p>“These people are fine,” he told the driver as he stepped down onto the street. “But if any other woman is not wearing the proper hijab, don’t allow her on!” he barked, waving the bus away.</p> <p>Under orders from the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, Obeid has increased patrols since the decree earlier this month forcing all Afghan women to cover from head to toe, including their faces. But he described his mandate as much wider than dress code enforcement.</p> <p>“The people of Kabul are full of all kinds of corruption after the last 20 years, so now it is up to us to cleanse everyone,” he said.</p> <p>More than nine months into Taliban rule, the Ministry of Virtue and Vice is expanding its reach into all aspects of Afghan society. Women have been the targets of the ministry’s new laws, but on patrol, its employees enforce gender segregation, address allegations of bribery and demand that men pray regularly.</p> <p>“At the beginning, we had hope the Taliban would be softer, but now the only safe place for me is my home,” said Negina Lali, 22, a university student who was recently barred from attending class because she wasn’t dressed entirely in black.</p> <p>Lali has put her colorful scarves away, but even when she follows the Taliban’s new dress code, her parents worry about her going out.</p> <p>“My mother remembers the previous Taliban government, so she is very afraid for me. More and more, she tells me stories from that time,” she said.</p> <p>When the Taliban controlled Afghanistan in the 1990s, the Ministry of Virtue and Vice was one of its most feared institutions.</p> <p>As a young woman, Lali’s mother said she was beaten in the street by the ministry’s enforcers because she forgot to wear socks. Another time, she was whipped in front of her young children when the scarf covering her head and face was blown off by a gust of wind.</p> <p>“All this is to erase women,” Lali said. “They don’t want to see us outside at all. I only expect the situation to get worse.”</p> <p>Days after the ruling requiring women to cover in public, the Ministry of Virtue and Vice issued another edict mandating that women on television also cover their faces.</p> <p>Television news outlets in Kabul protested, but during a meeting shortly after the announcement, a team from the ministry ended the debate before it could begin.</p> <p>“The door is closed,” the team said, according to Khpolwak Sapai, the director of ToloNews, Afghanistan’s largest independent news network, who was at the meeting. Sapai has been in regular contact with the Ministry of Virtue and Vice for months over what he is allowed to broadcast.</p> <p>“At the beginning, it was like we were having normal conversations,” Sapai said, referring to the first time he was called in to discuss a ban on female actors in television dramas. “But with each order, they have become more and more strict. We used to see a path forward, but after this last decision, I can’t imagine it anymore.”</p>

Khatera Ahmadi, a news presenter at ToloNews, said she had no choice but to comply with the ruling. On air now, she wears a black scarf covering her head and face below the eyes.

"I don't really care about having to cover my face, our voice is what matters most," the 26-year-old said. "My goal is to raise the voices of millions of Afghan women. But what I am worried about is that next they will ban us from coming to work completely."

Mohammad Sadiq Akif, the spokesman for the ministry, insists that the restrictions on the rights and public lives of women are for the common good.

"Enforcing hijab is an important part of cleansing a society. When women wear the proper hijab, it prevents bad behavior in others," he said, claiming that the way Afghan women dressed in cities such as Kabul before the Taliban takeover encouraged sexual harassment from men.

"This is not a violation of women's rights, it gives women more freedom," he said.

Since the ruling on head-to-toe coverings, Akif estimates that two dozen families have been summoned to the ministry after their female relatives violated the dress code. In all cases, he said, male relatives agreed to enforce the ruling.

Akif dismissed the international outrage over the Taliban's treatment of women.

"No other country should intervene in our domestic affairs," he said. "The world must respect Afghanistan's decision."

During another vice and virtue patrol, a team stopped at a bazaar. They moved from store to store and asked shopkeepers whether they break to pray and if they have witnessed corruption, and they warned them against serving women who are not fully covered.

"Why are you asking about these things?" asked a man stepping out from the crowd. "The government should be focusing on other issues like fixing the economy and providing jobs," he said, identifying himself as Abdul Ahad, a 24-year-old doctor.

The team told him to raise his concerns with the Ministry of Labor or other relevant branches of government.

"But you are the only people from the government who I see, no one else comes here," he said as the team walked away.

An owner of an amusement park in Kabul made a similar observation about the widening reach of the vice and virtue teams.

"They are everywhere. In every part of our lives and every part of the country," he said, speaking on the condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal. Teams visit his park regularly, and he blames them for plummeting attendance, saying gender segregation makes it almost impossible for a family to visit together.

"Just watching the news, we hear more about the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice than any other ministry. It seems they are responsible for everything important," he said.

Lali, the university student, has felt her life shrink with each new restriction.

"It's not just about clothing, they are taking away our freedom to make our own choices," she said. "It is like they don't accept women as human beings."

But the ministry has argued repeatedly that it is simply implementing Islamic law.

	<p>“The criticism in the media is just propaganda,” said Obeid, as his team finished its day with a stop for ice cream. He’s been on hundreds of patrols in Kabul, he said, and “no woman ever told me we are taking away their rights.”</p> <p>When pressed, he snapped.</p> <p>“We are carrying out the order of God. It doesn’t matter what women say they want.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/25 Taliban: mosque blast, minivan bombings
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/may/25/blast-in-kabul-mosque-is-bombs-in-north-afghanista/
GIST	<p>ISLAMABAD (AP) — A series of explosions shook Afghanistan on Wednesday, the Taliban said, including a blast inside a mosque in the capital of Kabul that killed at least five worshippers and three bombings of minivans in the country’s north that killed nine passengers.</p> <p>The Islamic State group’s local affiliate claimed responsibility for the minivan bombings.</p> <p>The Kabul Emergency Hospital said it received 22 victims of the mosque bombing, including five dead. There were no further details on the blast that struck the Hazrat Zakaria Mosque in the city’s central Police District 4, according to Khalid Zadran, a Taliban police spokesman in Kabul.</p> <p>“The blast took place while people were inside the mosque for the evening prayers,” Zadran said, adding that they were waiting for an update.</p> <p>The minivans were targeted in the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif after explosive devices were placed inside the vehicles, according to Mohammad Asif Waziri, a Taliban-appointed spokesman in Balkh province. He said the explosions killed nine and wounded 15.</p> <p>All the victims in Mazar-e-Sharif were from the country’s minority Shiite Muslims, according to a police official who spoke on condition of anonymity as he was not authorized to give details to the media.</p> <p>The ISIS claim of responsibility was posted on the Sunni militant group’s Aamaq news agency. The statement said IS targeted three buses with improvised explosive devices.</p> <p>There was no claim of responsibility for the Kabul mosque explosion but it also bore the hallmarks of the regional affiliate of the Islamic State group, known as Islamic State in Khorasan Province, or IS-K.</p> <p>The ISIS affiliate, which has been operating in Afghanistan since 2014, is seen as the greatest security challenge facing the country’s new Taliban rulers. Following their takeover when they seized power in Kabul and elsewhere in the country last August, the Taliban have launched a sweeping crackdown against the IS headquarters in eastern Afghanistan.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/24 Israel foils Hamas terror cell attacks
SOURCE	https://www.timesofisrael.com/shin-bet-foils-hamas-plot-to-assassinate-mk-ben-gvir-bomb-jerusalem-rail-with-drone/
GIST	<p>Israeli security forces uncovered an active Hamas terror cell in East Jerusalem that planned a series of attacks, including against far-right MK Itamar Ben Gvir, authorities said Tuesday.</p> <p>According to the Shin Bet security agency and Israel Police, the five men planned a shooting attack against Ben Gvir and other Israeli targets, as well as kidnappings of Israeli soldiers, and a bombing attack on the Jerusalem light rail using a drone.</p>

The security authorities said the cell was led by Rashid Rashak, “a prominent Hamas operative, a resident of the Old City of Jerusalem.”

He was also accused of establishing a network of Hamas supporters who led recent clashes on Jerusalem’s Temple Mount last month.

Shin Bet and police said Rashak planned, together with Mansour Safadi, another Hamas operative from the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Abu Tor, a shooting attack or suicide bombing attack in Jerusalem.

Authorities seized a drone that was intended to be armed and used in an attack on Jerusalem’s light rail.

The investigation found that the cell planned to hide in the West Bank cities of Hebron or Jenin after committing the attacks, the Shin Bet said.

According to Channel 12 news, the cell monitored Ben Gvir’s home in the West Bank settlement of Kiryat Arba, adjacent to Hebron, and logged the times he left — especially by foot.

The five were arrested last month, and were charged with several terror offenses, according to indictments published Tuesday. The other three suspects were named as Mohammed Salima, Hamza Abu Naab, and Safian Ajlouni.

Channel 12 said one of the main suspects was initially detained ahead of clashes on Jerusalem’s Temple Mount. During that interrogation, he confessed to the attack plans, the network said.

Members of a Hamas cell arrested by Israeli security forces in April 2022: (Clockwise from top left) Rashid Rashak, Mansour Safadi, Safian Ajlouni, Hamza Abu Naab, and Mohammed Salima. (Shin Bet) Responding to the announcement, Ben Gvir blamed left-wing activists, as well as Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, for the Hamas plot.

“The writing was on the wall. The incitement of the leftists against me and the statements of Bennett and Lapid toward me did their part, and it turns out that a squad of terrorists planned to try to harm me and my family,” Ben Gvir said on Twitter.

“Words can kill!” he added.

Last month, Bennett ordered that Ben Gvir be prevented from marching at Jerusalem’s Old City’s Damascus Gate, a site of frequent violence, after the Shin Bet warned it may lead to “significant harm” to Israel’s security.

Ben Gvir’s march was planned amid sky-high tensions in the region, with near-daily clashes between Palestinians and police on the Temple Mount and Gazan groups threatening to renew rocket fire. Officials feared allowing the march to go ahead could spark a repeat of the May 2021 war between Israel and Hamas-led fighters in Gaza.

On Sunday, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh warned Israel against allowing right-wing Israelis to conduct the annual Jerusalem Day “Flag March” in Jerusalem’s Old City next week.

The foiled attempt by the Hamas cell came amid heightened tensions between Israel and the Palestinians, against a backdrop of terror attacks that have left 19 dead since March 22. In a rare move, Hamas’s military wing claimed responsibility for one of those attacks — a terror shooting that left an Israeli security guard dead at the entrance to the West Bank settlement of Ariel.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 Scientists mystified monkeypox outbreak
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/monkeypox-genome-contact-tracing-offer-clues-on-outbreak-origins-11653500330?mod=hp_featst_pos4
GIST	<p>Disease detectives are uncovering clues to the origins of a monkeypox outbreak that has sickened more than 200 people, including the possibility that the cases lead back to a single infection.</p> <p>Researchers in countries including Portugal, Germany, Belgium and the U.S. have sequenced samples from confirmed cases and shared their findings online. Researchers from Portugal's National Institute of Health said in a post on a virology research-sharing forum that similarities between the viral genomes from 10 cases detected there and one from a patient in the U.S. appear to suggest that the outbreak had a single origin. Philippe Selhorst, a medical virologist at the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp, said that a case sequenced there, who had recently travelled from Lisbon, was genetically linked to the Portugal cases.</p> <p>Anne Rimoin, an infectious-disease epidemiologist at the University of California, Los Angeles, said more sequences would be required to gain the full picture. "I liken this to tuning into a new series, but we don't know what episode we've landed on," Dr. Rimoin said. "It seems like we missed some of the origin story."</p> <p>The virus, which typically causes flu-like symptoms followed by a rash that resembles chickenpox, has been detected in more than 20 countries outside of the parts of Africa where it is endemic. Countries including Spain and the U.K. have reported dozens of cases. No deaths have been reported.</p> <p>Fifty-one cases have been confirmed in Madrid, all among men. All of the men visited either a sauna in Madrid, a gay-pride event on Gran Canaria in the Canary Islands, or private parties in the city, according to a spokesman for the city's health department.</p> <p>The majority, though not all, of cases globally have been detected in men who have sex with men, according to the World Health Organization. Monkeypox isn't thought to be sexually transmitted, but the close contact associated with sex could spread the virus, disease experts said.</p> <p>While contact at the sauna, the Gran Canaria event and the parties might have helped spread the virus, authorities believe monkeypox was introduced to Spain from someone who had traveled from the U.K., according to the spokesman. Travelers from the U.K. are thought to have attended some private parties in Madrid, the spokesman said.</p> <p>Monkeypox usually requires close contact to spread. Travel-related cases of monkeypox that have been detected in Europe and the U.S. in the past typically didn't go on to infect others. This outbreak is unusual because all but one known case had no recent travel history to West and Central Africa.</p> <p>Contact tracing needs to stretch back six weeks prior to a positive test, said Antonio Zapatero, a senior health official for Madrid, because the virus can spread weeks before a person feels unwell and exhibits symptoms. Monkeypox has an incubation period of up to 21 days, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The number of cases world-wide point to an outbreak that has been spreading for weeks or even months, say epidemiologists.</p> <p>Another factor that could be contributing to the spread is that population immunity to monkeypox, once conferred by smallpox vaccination, has dropped. Smallpox vaccination also provides protection against monkeypox because the two viruses are closely related, although monkeypox is much less severe. Smallpox vaccination campaigns ended in the 1970s as the disease was eradicated, meaning almost everyone born since then has no immunity to monkeypox either.</p> <p>It is also possible the virus has mutated in ways that make it more transmissible. There is no evidence of that so far, though, said Jimmy Whitworth, professor of international public health at the London School</p>

	<p>of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. “Any infection can spread like wildfire in a close-knit community,” he said.</p> <p>Some epidemiologists said cases could be going undetected. While monkeypox can cause an obvious rash, it can also cause mild symptoms. The virus can cause a sporadic rash with as little as one lesion, said David Heymann, professor of infectious-disease epidemiology at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.</p> <p>“The extent to which other folks are affected is not at all clear,” said Bill Hanage, associate professor of epidemiology at Harvard University.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/25 Pakistan city fearful: 123.8deg. heatwave
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/may/25/it-seems-this-heat-will-take-our-lives-pakistan-city-fearful-jacobabad-after-hitting-51c
GIST	<p>Muhammad Akbar, 40, sells dried chickpeas on a wheelbarrow in Jacobabad, and has suffered heatstroke three times in his life.</p> <p>But now, he says, the heat is getting worse. “In those days there were many trees in the whole city and there was no shortage of water and we had other facilities so we could easily beat the heat. But now there are no trees or other facilities including water, due to which the heat is becoming unbearable. I’m scared that this heat will take our lives in the coming years.”</p> <p>As Pakistan and India sweltered during the recent heatwave, the city of Jacobabad, where Akbar lives, hit a record-breaking 51C. Normally the summer heat starts from the last week of May, but this year, for the first time according to the people here, the heat began in March. Now it will continue till August.</p> <p>According to the ecologist Nasir Ali Panhwar, author of several books on the environment, the city is particularly badly affected by global heating. This is partly because the city is located in a place where the winter sun comes directly and warms more. Others point out that most of the trees that used to shade the city and the surrounding fields have been cut down and sold, or burned in cooking stoves.</p> <p>Sardar Sarfaraz, a chief meteorologist of the Pakistan Meteorological Department, told the media that the temperature had already reached 49C in April, a record. He pointed out that Jacobabad “is one of the hottest places in the world” and warned that if the heat began to arrive so early, it was a matter of serious concern.</p> <p>Akbar says he is worried about the temperature this year. “The heat is increasing every year but the government, including the district administration, is not paying any attention to this serious issue.” Like most of his community, Akbar goes to work early in the morning and works for 12 to 14 hours, earning about 500 rupees (£1.98) a day. He has no choice but to face the heatwave.</p> <p>Mashooq Ali, the president of the rice mill workers’ union, said that despite the temperatures, “still we have to work because if we do not work, the stove of the house will not work”.</p> <p>Most workers take two hours off in the afternoon, according to Ali, and then go back to work. “When it gets too hot, we used to sit under the water handpump and use ice water. In the evening when we return home we get extremely tired and want to rest but because of the heat, we do not get enough sleep. Then we go out and sit in an open space so that some air can be felt, but when there is no air, it seems that this heat will take our lives.”</p> <p>The inhabitants of Jacobabad use hand fans and take frequent baths with cold water from hand pumps. Free cold-water camps have reportedly been set up at four places in the city, and are drawing huge crowds.</p>

	<p>Some residents with enough resources move to other parts of the country during these months to escape the heat. According to Huzoor Bakhsh, a journalist who has been reporting in Jacobabad for 20 years, many working-class people move to Quetta in Balochistan, where they work as labourers. He said that because of the deforestation, the intensity of heat had also increased. “Now the people have no way to escape the heatwave and the district administration is inactive in this regard.”</p> <p>Dr Irshad Ali Sarki, at Jacobabad MS civil hospital, told the Guardian that heatwave wards had been set up to prevent heatstroke, with four or five heatstroke patients admitted and treated daily. Dr Ammad Ullah, another doctor at the hospital, estimates that 50 to 60 people are getting heatstroke every day in this hot season, and said the hospital did not have the capacity to cope. “Some seek treatment from private clinics but the working class do not have the money to get their treatment,” he said.</p> <p>Citizens complain that, despite the heatwave, the government is not providing drinking water. Donkey carts selling blue plastic cans of water can be seen in large numbers, but there are question marks over the quality of this water.</p> <p>According to the district administration, the system is complete and water is being supplied through it, but the citizens say the water is polluted and not safe for drinking.</p> <p>Social activist Mohammad Shaaban is deeply concerned about the rising heat. “We have protested many times for the district administration to take action but no action has been taken yet,” he said. “We fear that in the next few years, Jacobabad will not be able to house humans and animals.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/25 Underwater drone tracks CO2 Alaska gulf
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/An-ocean-first-Underwater-drone-tracks-CO2-in-17197940.php
GIST	<p>SEWARD, Alaska (AP) — In the cold, choppy waters of Alaska’s Resurrection Bay, all eyes were on the gray water, looking for one thing only.</p> <p>It wasn’t a spout from humpback whales that power through this scenic fjord, or a sea otter lazing on its back, munching a king crab.</p> <p>Instead, everyone aboard the Nanuq, a University of Alaska Fairbanks research vessel, was looking where a 5-foot (1.52-meter) long, bright pink underwater sea glider surfaced.</p> <p>The glider — believed to be the first configured with a large sensor to measure carbon dioxide levels in the ocean — had just completed its first overnight mission.</p> <p>Designed to dive 3,281 feet (1,000 meters) and roam remote parts of the ocean, the autonomous vehicle was deployed in the Gulf of Alaska this spring to provide a deeper understanding of the ocean’s chemistry in the era of climate change. The research could be a major step forward in ocean greenhouse gas monitoring, because until now, measuring CO2 concentrations — a quantifier of ocean acidification — was mostly done from ships, buoys and moorings tethered to the ocean floor.</p> <p>“Ocean acidification is a process by which humans are emitting carbon dioxide into the atmosphere through their activities of burning fossil fuels and changing land use,” said Andrew McDonnell, an oceanographer with the College of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences at the University of Alaska Fairbanks</p> <p>Oceans have done humans a huge favor by taking in some of the CO2. Otherwise, there would be much more in the atmosphere, trapping the sun's heat and warming the Earth.</p> <p>“But the problem is now that the ocean is changing its chemistry because of this uptake,” said Claudine Hauri, an oceanographer with the International Arctic Research Center at the university.</p>

The enormous amount of data collected is being used to study ocean acidification that can harm and kill certain marine life.

Rising acidity of the oceans is affecting some marine organisms that build shells. This process could kill or make an organism more susceptible to predators.

Over several weeks this spring, Hauri and McDonnell, who are married, worked with engineers from Cyprus Subsea Consulting and Services, which provided the underwater glider, and 4H-Jena, a German company that provided the sensor inserted into the drone.

Most days, researchers took the glider farther and farther into Resurrection Bay from the coastal community of Seward to conduct tests.

After its first nighttime mission, a crew member spotted it bobbing in the water, and the Nanuq — the Inupiat word for polar bear — backed up to let people pull the 130-pound (59-kilogram) glider onto the ship. Then the sensor was removed from the drone and rushed into the ship's cabin to upload its data.

Think of the foot-tall (0.30-meter) sensor with a diameter of 6 inches (15.24 centimeters) as a laboratory in a tube, with pumps, valves and membranes moving to separate the gas from seawater. It analyzes CO₂ and it logs and stores the data inside a temperature-controlled system. Many of these sensor components use battery power.

Since it's the industry standard, the sensor is the same as found on any ship or lab working with CO₂ measurements.

Hauri said using this was "a huge step to be able to accommodate such a big and power hungry sensor, so that's special about this project."

"I think she is one of the first persons to actually utilize (gliders) to measure CO₂ directly, so that's very, very exciting," said Richard Feely, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's senior scientist at the agency's Pacific Marine Environmental Laboratory in Seattle. He said Hauri was a graduate student in 2007 when she accompanied him on the first acidification cruise he ever led.

The challenge, Feely said, is to make the measurements on a glider with the same degree of accuracy and precision as tests on board ships.

"We need to get confidence in our measurements and confidence in our models if we are going to make important scientific statements about how the oceans are changing over time and how it's going to impact our important economic systems that are dependent on the food from the sea," he said, noting that acidification impacts are already seen in the Pacific Northwest on oysters, Dungeness crabs and other species.

Researchers in Canada had previously attached a smaller, prototype CO₂ sensor to an underwater drone in the Labrador Sea but found it did not yet meet the targets for ocean acidification observations.

"The tests showed that the glider sensor worked in a remote-harsh environment but needed more development," Nicolai von Oppeln-Bronikowski, the Glider Program Manager with the Ocean Frontier Institute at Memorial University of Newfoundland, said in an email.

The two teams are "just using two different types of sensors to solve the same issue, and it's always good to have two different options," Hauri said.

There is no GPS unit inside the underwater autonomous drone. Instead, after being programmed, it heads out on its own to cruise the ocean according to the navigation directions — knowing how far to go down in the water column, when to sample, and when to surface and send a locator signal so it can be retrieved.

	<p>As the drone tests were underway, the U.S. research vessel Sikuliaq, owned by the National Science Foundation and operated by the university, conducted its own two-week mission in the gulf to take carbon and pH samples as part of ongoing work each spring, summer and fall.</p> <p>Those methods are limited to collecting samples from a fixed point while the glider will be able to roam all over the ocean and provide researchers with a wealth of data on the ocean's chemical makeup.</p> <p>The vision is to one day have a fleet of robotic gliders operating in oceans across the globe, providing a real-time glimpse of current conditions and a way to better predict the future.</p> <p>“We can ... understand much more about what’s going on in the ocean than we have been before,” McDonnell said.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/25 Crystal Mountain extends ski season
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/crystal-mountain-extending-ski-season-through-june-12-after-10-feet-of-cumulative-snow-in-april-may
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON - After receiving over 10 feet of cumulative snowfall in April and May, Crystal Mountain announced that it will be extending its ski and ride season for two additional weekends through June 12.</p> <p>After Memorial Day weekend, skiing and riding will continue Friday-Sunday, June 3-5 and June 10-12 from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., the resort announced.</p> <p>Lifts will also be running Friday through Monday this Memorial Day weekend.</p> <p>The latest closing date in history was July 16, 2011. This will be the fifth time in the last two decades that the resort has operated into June.</p> <p>"For the bonus weekends in June, Crystal Mountain plans to run Green Valley Express lift and the Mt. Rainier Gondola, taking advantage of the deeper snowpack at higher elevations. After a dry mid-season, we are thrilled to be able to extend the spring ski season into June. Our motto this spring is "the snow must go on," and that is proving to be true. We are committed to staying open as long as we can for our guests to keep skiing and are excited to be able to end the season strong," said Emma Brice, Communications Coordinator for Crystal Mountain.</p> <p>The Mt. Rainier Gondola will be open for scenic rides Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays, and Memorial Day from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.</p>
Return to Top	

Crime, Criminals

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	05/26 Another Texas school ‘violence threat’
SOURCE	https://www.the-sun.com/news/5426750/donna-independent-school-threat-texas/
GIST	<p>A TEXAS school district has canceled classes for the rest of the week due to credible threats of violence. The Donna Independent School District will be shutting down all their schools after police reportedly found an AK-47 and a list of targeted students in a suspect's home.</p> <p>“We’ve received a credible threat of violence that is currently under investigation,” the district said in a statement on Thursday.</p> <p>“In light of the recent events and in an abundance of caution, we will be canceling school district-wide classes and staff will work from home. The safety and security of our students & staff is our first priority.”</p>

	<p>A source told My RGV News that after the threat was reported to police, they found an AK-47 rifle and a list of targeted students in one of the suspect's homes.</p> <p>Classes are scheduled to resume after Memorial Day, on Tuesday, May 31.</p> <p>The Donna district is in southeast Texas, near the US-Mexico border.</p> <p>The announcement comes just days after an 18-year-old gunman stormed Gregg Elementary school in Uvalde, killing 19 students and two teachers.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/25 Gunmen in mass school shootings
SOURCE	https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20220525-what-we-know-about-mass-school-shootings-in-the-u-s-and-the-gunmen-who-carry-them-out
GIST	<p>When the Columbine High School massacre took place in 1999 it was seen as a watershed moment in the United States – the worst mass shooting at a school in the country’s history.</p> <p>Now, it ranks fourth. The three school shootings to surpass its death toll of 13 – 12 students, one teacher – have all taken place within the last decade: 2012’s Sandy Hook Elementary attack, in which a gunman killed 26 children and school staff; the 2018 shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, which claimed the lives of 17 people; and now the Robb Elementary School assault in Uvalde, Texas, where on May 24, 2022, at least 19 children and two adults were murdered.</p> <p>We are criminologists who study the life histories of public mass shooters in the U.S. As part of that research, we built a comprehensive database of mass public shootings using public data, with the shooters coded on over 200 different variables, including location and racial profile. For the purposes of our database, mass public shootings are defined as incidents in which four or more victims are murdered with at least one of those homicides taking place in a public location and with no connection to underlying criminal activity, such as gangs or drugs.</p> <p>Our database shows that since 1966, when our database timeline begins, there have been 13 such shootings at schools across the U.S – the first in Stockton, California, in 1989.</p> <p>Four of those shootings – including the one at Robb Elementary School – involved a killing at another location, always a family member at a residence. There have been reports the most recent perpetrator shot his grandmother prior to going to the school in Uvalde, although that has yet to be officially confirmed.</p> <p>The majority of mass school shootings were carried out by a lone gunman, with just two – Columbine and the 1988 shooting at Westside School in Jonesboro, Arkansas – carried out by two gunmen. In all, some 146 people were killed in the attacks and at least 182 victims injured.</p> <p>The choice of “gunmen” to describe the perpetrators is accurate – all of the mass school shootings in our database were carried out by men or boys. And the average age of those involved in carrying out the attacks was 18.</p> <p>This fits with the picture that has emerged of the shooter in the Robb Elementary School attack. He turned 18 just days ago and purchased two military-style weapons thought to be the ones used in the attack.</p> <p>Police have yet to release key information on the shooter, including what motivated him to kill the children and adults at Robb Elementary School. The picture of the shooter that has emerged conforms to the profile we have built up from past perpetrators in some ways, but diverges in others.</p> <p>We know that most school shooters have a connection to the school they target. Twelve of the 14 school shooters in our database prior to the most recent attack in Texas were either current or former students of</p>

the school. Any prior connection between the latest shooter and Robb Elementary School has not been released to the public.

Our research and [dozens of interviews with incarcerated perpetrators of mass shootings](#) suggests that for most perpetrators, the mass shooting event is intended to be a final act. The majority of school mass shooters die in the attack. Of the 15 mass school shooters in our database, just seven were apprehended. The rest died on the scene, nearly all by suicide – the lone exception being the Robb Elementary shooter, who was shot dead by police.

And school shooters tend to preempt their attacks by leaving posts, messages or videos warning of their intent.

Inspired by past school shooters, some perpetrators are [seeking fame and notoriety](#). However, most school shooters are motivated by a generalized anger. Their path to violence involves self-hate and despair turned outward at the world, and our research finds they often communicate their intent to do harm in advance as a final, desperate [cry for help](#). The key to stopping these tragedies is for society to be [alert to these warning signs](#) and act on them immediately.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 Officials: gunman in school about 40min.
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/may/25/texas-school-shooting-gunman-facebook
GIST	<p>The Texas gunman who shot and killed 19 children and two teachers was inside the school for about 40 minutes before being killed by Border Control agents, officials have said, as onlookers spoke of their frustration at what they viewed as delays by law enforcement.</p> <p>The first reports of an armed man approaching the school began to surface at about 11:30am on Tuesday. Just after 1pm, the 18-year-old was confirmed dead after he was shot inside the Robb Elementary School classroom in the small city of Uvalde.</p> <p>There have been conflicting reports about what happened before the shooter entered the building and how law enforcement outside tried to “engage” and stop him.</p> <p>About “40 minutes or so” elapsed from when the gunman opened fire on the school security officer, entered the school through a back door and when the Border Patrol team shot him, Texas department of public safety director Steve McCraw told a news briefing.</p> <p>Officials said that officers at the scene were able to successfully “contain” the gunman until more specially trained officers could arrive.</p> <p>Lt. Christopher Olivarez of the Department of Public Safety told CNN the gunman charged into a classroom where he “barricaded himself by locking the door and just started shooting children and teachers that were inside that classroom”.</p> <p>A separate law enforcement official familiar with the investigation told the Associated Press that Border Patrol agents had trouble breaching the classroom door and had to get a staff member to open the room with a key.</p> <p>Onlookers have also since said they urged police officers to charge into the school, claiming more could have been done.</p> <p>Juan Carranza, 24, who saw the scene from outside his house, across the street from the school, told the Associated Press he felt the officers should have entered the school sooner. “Go in there! Go in there!” nearby women shouted at the officers soon after the attack began, he said. Carranza said the officers did not go in.</p>

Javier Cazares, whose fourth grade daughter, Jacklyn Cazares, was killed in the attack, said he raced to the school when he heard about the shooting, arriving while police were still massed outside the building.

Upset that police were not moving in, he raised the idea of charging into the school with several other bystanders. "Let's just rush in because the cops aren't doing anything like they are supposed to," he said. "More could have been done ... They were unprepared."

US Border Patrol chief Raul Ortiz told CNN that dozens of on-duty and off-duty agents responded to the shooting, adding that as soon as officers arrived, "they didn't hesitate."

"We responded from various locations. I had both on-duty, off-duty, folks that were in a training environment all responded to this location," Ortiz said, adding that between 80 and 100 officers responded.

"They didn't hesitate. They came up with a plan. They entered that classroom and they took care of the situation as quickly as they possibly could."

The gunman also discussed his plans on Facebook prior to the attack, the governor of Texas said at a press conference on Wednesday.

Greg Abbott said the shooter "posted" on Facebook three times before the deadly massacre at Robb elementary school.

Although Abbott described them as posts, which are typically distributed to a wide audience, Facebook later stepped in to note that the gunman had sent one-to-one direct messages, not public posts, and that they weren't discovered until "after the terrible tragedy".

"We are closely cooperating with law enforcement in their ongoing investigation," tweeted the Facebook spokesperson Andy Stone on Wednesday.

In the first message, sent 30 minutes before the gunman went to the school, he said he would shoot his grandmother. The second said, "I shot my grandmother." And the third, sent about 15 minutes before the attack, said: "I'm going to shoot an elementary school." He did not specify which school, officials said, and it was not clear who the messages were sent to.

The Texas governor described the messages at a news conference where he said the shooter, identified as 18-year-old Salvador Ramos, used an AR-15 to attack the school in Uvalde, a predominantly Latino city of about 16,000 people in a farming area about 75 miles (120 kilometers) from the Mexican border and 85 miles (135 kilometers) from San Antonio. Abbott also said the shooter's grandmother had called the police before he shot her.

The shooting was the deadliest gun rampage in an American school in almost a decade. Authorities have said the victims were all killed in the same fourth grade classroom, where the shooter barricaded himself inside.

A high school dropout, Ramos lived in Uvalde and had no known criminal record or history of mental health problems, Abbott said.

Investigators have also been scrutinizing an Instagram account that apparently belonged to the gunman. In the days before the shooting, posts featured a photo of a hand holding an ammunition magazine and another photo of two AR-15-style rifles. The account asked another Instagram user to share the latter photo with her 10,000 followers; she declined, saying it was "scary" and she barely knew him.

On the morning of the massacre, the account linked to the attacker sent her an ominous message: "I'm about to."

	<p>Instagram declined to answer questions from the Associated Press about the postings.</p> <p>The latest mass shooting is likely to further intensify pressure on social media companies to heighten their scrutiny of online communications. The attack in Texas follows the shooting at a Buffalo grocery store less than two weeks ago, where the gunman used social media to plan, promote and livestream the massacre that killed 10 people. The New York attorney general has since opened an investigation into Twitch, 4chan, 8chan and Discord along with other platforms the Buffalo shooter used to amplify the attack.</p> <p>Facebook's parent company, Meta, has said it monitors people's private messages for some kinds of harmful content, such as links to malware or images of child sexual abuse. But images can be detected using unique identifiers – a kind of digital signature – which makes them relatively easy for computer systems to flag. Trying to interpret a string of threatening words – which can resemble a joke, satire or song lyrics – is a far more difficult task for artificial intelligence systems.</p> <p>Facebook and other platforms therefore rely on user reports to catch threats, harassment and other violations of the law or their own policies. As evidenced by the latest shootings, the information often comes too late, if at all.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	05/25 Texted friend earlier: 'shoot up school'
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/25/us/texas-gunman-text.html
GIST	<p>The gunman who killed 19 children and two adults at a school in Uvalde, Texas, told an online acquaintance that he had just shot his grandmother and was about to “shoot up a elementary school” minutes before carrying out one of the deadliest school shootings in United States history, according to screenshots provided by the friend.</p> <p>A 15-year-old girl in Germany who asked to be identified only by her nickname, Cece, said in an interview that she had met the future gunman, Salvador Ramos, about two weeks earlier on Yubo, an app that lets people livestream themselves to strangers and through which other teenagers from California to Greece said they had interacted with Mr. Ramos.</p> <p>Mr. Ramos turned 18 on May 16, and the girl said that he had video called her in the days around his birthday from a gun store, where he told her he was purchasing an AR-15 rifle. In the following days, Mr. Ramos obliquely referred to doing something with the gun, though she said she was never clear about what. On Monday evening, the night before the shooting, she said, he told her that a package had arrived from an online order and sent her a picture of a large cardboard box that he later said contained ammunition that would expand on impact. Cece said Mr. Ramos also showed her, on a video call, a black bag that appeared to hold many magazines of ammunition and at least one gun.</p> <p>On Tuesday morning, the two spoke on a video call just before 10 a.m., according to the girl's phone logs. She said Mr. Ramos showed her the outfit he was wearing, which was all black. He said he could not tell her his secret until his grandfather had left the house.</p> <p>At 11:06 a.m., he texted her that he was “waiting for” his grandmother, who he said was “on the phone with AT&T” about his cell phone. He referred to her with a vulgar expletive. “Ima do something to her rn,” he wrote. The screenshots do not show Cece replying, but at 11:21 a.m., Mr. Ramos sent another text: “I just shot my grandma in her head,” followed immediately by another: “Ima go shoot up a elementary school rn.”</p> <p>Cece said she read the messages as soon as he sent them but was “curious” about whether he was serious. It was only after the shooting appeared on the news that she asked a friend in the United States to contact U.S. authorities, a delay she said she now regrets.</p> <p>“Maybe I could've changed the outcome,” she said. “I just could never guess that he'd actually do this.”</p>

	<p>Gov. Greg Abbott of Texas said on Wednesday that Mr. Ramos had shot his grandmother in the face before driving off in a pickup truck that was registered to her. Mr. Ramos’s grandmother survived and called the police as he headed for Robb Elementary School, less than a mile away, and began shooting students and teachers inside a fourth-grade classroom.</p> <p>Mr. Abbott said that Mr. Ramos had posted on Facebook that he had shot his grandmother and was going to shoot people at an elementary school, but a Facebook spokesman said that the governor was inaccurately referring to what the company said were “private messages.” It was unclear if the messages that the spokesman and governor appeared to be referring to were sent on Facebook, by text message or on another messaging platform.</p> <p>To verify that she was speaking with Mr. Ramos, Cece provided screenshots of a video call that appeared to show Mr. Ramos’s face as well as a screenshot of a message he had sent her from an Instagram account that he had used to message others.</p> <p>When Cece saw news of the attack, she said, she got in touch with another friend that she had befriended on Yubo and asked her to contact the authorities, she said.</p> <p>Cece said that Mr. Ramos, in their previous conversations, had suggested that he had a poor relationship with both his mother and his grandmother and that he had previously punched his older sister, kicked his grandmother and shoved an ex-girlfriend.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/25 Debunking Texas shooting viral rumors
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/25/technology/texas-shooting-misinformation.html
GIST	<p>Rumors about the gunman and what had taken place spread widely online — often with easily debunked evidence or none at all — almost immediately after the first official reports about the deadly school shooting in Uvalde, Texas.</p> <p>Here are three of the most prominent rumors that have spread on online platforms such as Twitter, Gab, 4chan and Reddit.</p> <p>1. No, the shooting was not a staged ‘false flag’ operation.</p> <p>Hours after the attack on Tuesday, far-right figures spread misinformation claiming that the shooting was a “false flag” attack. Among their unfounded claims were that the shooting had been orchestrated to draw local law enforcement away from the border, allowing criminals and drugs to cross into the United States, and that gun-control advocates had organized the tragedy to stoke public outrage.</p> <p>Other social media posts alleged that parents shown in news clips awaiting news of their children appeared to be insufficiently emotional and were crisis actors being paid to play a role. The two teachers who were killed were also accused of being crisis actors.</p> <p>Claims of crisis actors and false flags in school shootings are not new: The conspiracy theorist and broadcaster Alex Jones of Infowars has lied for years that the 2012 massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newton, Conn., was staged by the federal government, with people pretending to be survivors and victims’ parents. Last year, Mr. Jones lost four defamation lawsuits filed by victims’ families, many of whom have been harassed by his believers.</p> <p>2. No, there is no evidence that the gunman was transgender.</p> <p>Hours after the attack, a post on the fringe online message board 4chan circulated claiming that the gunman was transgender. Numerous photographs falsely claiming to show the gunman wearing women’s clothing were attached.</p> <p>The authorities have said the gunman was male.</p>

The unfounded claims made their way to Telegram channels of far-right militia groups such as the Proud Boys, where people falsely claimed that the shooting was a result of hormone therapy undertaken by the gunman.

By Wednesday, the claims that the gunman was transgender had been amplified by high-profile people such as Representative Paul Gosar, an Arizona Republican who was [censured last year](#) by the House after he posted a video that depicted him killing a Democratic lawmaker. Mr. Gosar's Twitter post on the matter has been deleted.

Photos of dark-haired transgender women circulated alongside images of the gunman's face, accompanied with false accusations that they were the same person. "There is an overwhelming number of individuals who are posting images of this person, who was the shooter, and information about the nature of them being transgender," Stacy Washington, the host of the SiriusXM show "Stacy on the Right," said on Tuesday night. She added: "We don't have definitive proof, but I'd say, this many pictures? My goodness. There's something going on here."

On Tuesday, a transgender artist said on Reddit that people online "just took my photos and used it to spread misinformation." After the artist posted other photos as proof, an account on Twitter that discusses gun rights deleted a post that had included the artist's photo and apologized.

A 22-year-old transgender student living in New York also reported that photos of her were falsely linked to the gunman. She posted photos of herself on Twitter to prove her identity and asked people to stop saying the photos of her were of the gunman.

"Im very close to crying," she posted at one point.

The Trans Safety Network, a research group that monitors threats against the transgender community, said [in a statement](#) on Wednesday that it had identified photos of three transgender people wrongly linked to the gunman and confirmed that all three were alive.

Mr. Gosar and Ms. Washington did not respond to requests for comment.

3. No, the gunman was not an undocumented immigrant.

False claims that the gunman was born outside the United States began to circulate within hours of the shooting. Spread largely on white nationalist Telegram channels and Gab accounts, the claims alleged that he was an undocumented immigrant in the United States, even after authorities including Roland Gutierrez, a Texas state senator, confirmed that the gunman was born in North Dakota.

Two Telegram groups with ties to white supremacist figures claimed Wednesday that the gunman had "illegally penetrated" the country from the Mexican border. The groups, which each have thousands of followers, went on to falsely claim that the gunman was undocumented in the United States.

"Did he cross the border illegally?" Code of Vets, a veterans organization, posted on Twitter. "Our nation has a serious national security crisis evolving."

Later, the group added a post noting that "the shooter has been confirmed to be a citizen" while stating: "Mental health must be addressed. Our border must be secured."

Mr. Gosar also said the gunman had been in the country illegally.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 Spokane PD active shooter protocol
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/local/spokane-police-department-how-officers-train-shooter-situations/293-757a04f9-1350-4e55-b3ef-b6251c26d15f

GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — Following the recent shooting in Uvalde, Texas, the Spokane Police Department shared what active shooter training looks like for its officers.</p> <p>According to Officer Nick Briggs, every couple of years, Spokane police participate in a regional live action training for an active shooter scenario. But, multiple times a year, officers go through specialized skills training to be even more prepared.</p> <p>Responding to an active shooter situation is extremely chaotic for first responders, which is why Officer Nick Briggs said they focus on communication when training with other emergency services.</p> <p>“Having officers know how to communicate both with people they're familiar working with, but then also with people from other agencies that they've never met is really vital,” Briggs said.</p> <p>Through community partnerships, Briggs said SPD’s SWAT team also runs active shooter drills in a variety of buildings in Spokane, including churches, schools and large businesses.</p> <p>“Going into a building that we haven't seen or a structure we're unfamiliar with adds that degree of realism and makes us really test our skills a lot more because we can't script anything because we don't know it,” Briggs said.</p> <p>But, tactics for active shooter training has evolved over the years, according to Briggs.</p> <p>For example, law enforcement has learned that waiting to stop an active shooter threat cost lives. So now, Briggs said, officers don't wait.</p> <p>“The number one priority in the situation is protecting innocent lives,” Briggs said. “So officers, even though they're acting alone or acting in a small team, in haste it greatly increases the risk to the individual officers. At the end of the day, that's what we're there to do and that is the risk that everybody knew coming into this profession.”</p> <p>Based on initial reports, Briggs said it appears this is the same tactic used during the Uvalde shooting Tuesday.</p> <p>“The information I've seen is that a solo Border Patrol agent entered the building and was able to neutralize the threat there,” he said. “So, that's consistent with some of the evolution of the training that has occurred over the last 20 some years.”</p> <p>He adds the department is continually discussed the lessons learned from previous incidents nationally and locally.</p> <p>“The law enforcement community is really good about providing that information to fellow to partner agencies,” Briggs said. “Because ultimately these events are very tragic, and our job is to try to mitigate some of that tragedy and limit the loss of life.”</p> <p>Briggs said SPD did have officer posted outside a variety of Spokane schools Wednesday morning. There were no threats reported. The department just wanted to have a presence to reassure the community they are here.</p>
Return to Top	
HEADLINE	05/25 Texas school shooter
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/25/us/uvalde-texas-school-shooting-salvador-ramos/index.html
GIST	(CNN)The suspect who killed 19 kids and two teachers at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, was a local high school student with few if any friends who officials said legally purchased two assault rifles and scores of ammo last week for his 18th birthday.

Salvador Ramos was [identified as the gunman](#) who stormed into [Robb Elementary](#) on Tuesday with an assault rifle and tactical vest, barricaded himself in adjoining classrooms of children and opened fire, authorities said. Responding officers eventually forced their way into the room and a Border Patrol officer fatally shot him.

The heinous attack came just two days before students were set to be released for the summer and left a community and nation asking yet again: Who would do this, and why?

An examination of Ramos' personal background reveals a bullied loner with no criminal history and -- like so many other mass shooters in America -- interest in and access to high-powered firearms and ammunition in a [political system that prioritizes gun rights](#).

He purchased guns and ammo last week

The suspect's actions leading up to the shooting offer hints at his mindset and plan.

Ramos legally purchased two AR platform rifles at a local federal firearms licensee on May 17 and on May 20, according to state Sen. John Whitmire, who received a briefing from law enforcement Tuesday night. He also purchased 375 rounds of ammunition on May 18, Whitmire said, citing law enforcement.

State Sen. Ronald Gutierrez, who represents Uvalde, said the purchases were made for the suspect's 18th birthday.

"It's the first thing he did when he turned 18," he told CNN's Erin Burnett on Tuesday evening, citing a briefing he received from Texas Rangers.

Gutierrez said the guns were bought legally from a federally authorized dealer in the Uvalde area. "(He) had no problem accessing those weapons," he said.

He shot his grandmother and crashed vehicle before entering school

His shooting spree began Tuesday prior to arriving at Robb Elementary. Ramos first shot his grandmother at her home and then fled the scene, authorities said. The grandmother was airlifted to a hospital and was being treated in serious condition, officials said Wednesday.

"The first thing that happened was the gunman shot his grandmother ... She then contacted police. The gunman fled, and as he was fleeing had an accident just outside the elementary school and he ran into the school," Gov. Greg Abbott said at a news conference Wednesday.

From there, the suspect crashed his vehicle into a ditch near the elementary school and emerged with a rifle and a backpack while wearing a tactical vest that holds extra ammunition, Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) Sgt. Erick Estrada said.

Ramos moved toward the school and entered through a back door, DPS Director Steven McCraw said. A school resource officer "engaged" him but no shots were fired, he said.

The suspect dropped a bag full of ammunition outside of the school during that encounter and ran inside, Estrada told CNN's Wolf Blitzer. DPS is investigating what happened during the interaction with the officer.

The suspect then barricaded himself in a classroom and an adjoining classroom opened fire at those inside. All of the 19 children and two teachers killed were in those rooms, DPS spokesperson Lt. Chris Olivarez said.

"The initial group of officers that were on scene, at that point, they were at a point of disadvantage because the shooter was able to barricade himself inside that classroom. There was not sufficient manpower at that time and their main, their primary focus was preserve any further loss of life," Olivarez said. "So they

started breaking windows around the school, and trying to rescue, evacuate children and teachers while that was going on."

A specialized tactical team forced their way into the classroom and fatally shot the suspect, Olivarez said. One officer was shot and had a non-life-threatening injury, he added.

Uvalde firefighter Chip King told CNN's Jim Sciutto that it took about 30 minutes after he arrived on the scene for the gunman to be neutralized by law enforcement.

The shooter was on the premises for up to an hour before law enforcement forcibly entered a classroom and killed him, officials said Wednesday. "It's going to be within, like 40 minutes or something, [within] an hour," McCraw said.

Investigators found one of the suspect's rifles, manufactured by Daniel Defense, in the school with the suspect, Whitmire said, citing the ATF. The gunman's other rifle was left in the truck that crashed.

The suspect dropped a backpack with several magazines of ammunition near the entrance of the school, authorities told the state senator. Inside the school, authorities found what appears to be seven 30-round magazines.

He was a local student with few if any friends

Those who knew the suspect personally largely described him as a loner with little if any social life.

The suspect attended a local high school and lived with his grandparents, Olivarez said. He had no friends and had no criminal history or gang affiliation, he added.

He worked the day shift at a local Wendy's and kept mostly to himself, the restaurant's manager confirmed to CNN.

"He felt like the quiet type, the one who doesn't say much. He didn't really socialize with the other employees," Wendy's evening manager Adrian Mendes said. "He just worked, got paid, and came in to get his check."

A former classmate of the gunman said Ramos "would get severely bullied and made fun of a lot" and was taunted by others for the clothes he wore and his family's financial situation. "People would, like, actually call him school shooter and stuff like that," he said.

The classmate, who did not want to be identified by name, said he was somewhat "close" to Ramos. They sat together through high school and played Xbox together, he said.

The suspect had stopped attending school regularly and they communicated less aside from occasional invites to play Xbox. Recently, the suspect sent the classmate a picture of an AR-15, a backpack with rounds of ammunition and several gun magazines, he added.

"I was like, 'Bro, why do you have this?' and he was like, 'Don't worry about it,'" the friend said. "He proceeded to text me, 'I look very different now. You wouldn't recognize me.'"

Stanley Torres, a senior at Uvalde High School, told CNN he shared a gym class with Ramos and described him as a "very quiet person who hung out by himself." Another Uvalde High senior told CNN she "knew people didn't like him. People would make fun of him or want to fight him," but she said she wasn't sure why.

According to one former friend and a video obtained by CNN, the shooter had a history of physically fighting with others. The former friend and classmate said Ramos sent him the video on Snapchat more than a year ago. It depicts the shooter fighting with someone else, which the former friend said was not out of the ordinary, adding, "he would always get in fights in school."

Two other former classmates told CNN the person in the video is Ramos.

The suspect had no known mental health history, Abbott said.

He made warnings on social media messages

Hours before the shooting, the gunman made a series of ominous messages on different social media sites.

The Instagram account that was linked to Ramos posted a photo of two rifles lying on a carpet and also tagged another Instagram account by name in the photo. The owner of the tagged Instagram account wrote in a story posted after the shooting that the suspect had tagged her and messaged her out of the blue.

The girl, who did not include her name on her account and has since made her account private, posted screenshots of messages that she said she exchanged with the shooter in the days before the massacre.

In one, Ramos wrote "I'm about to" -- but didn't say what he would do. "I got a lil secret," he wrote in another message. "I wanna tell u." She responded she might take a nap soon but would respond if she was awake.

In messages posted to her story before it went private, the girl said that she didn't live in Texas and didn't know Ramos.

"the only reason i responded to him was because i was afraid of him i wish i stayed awake to at least try to convince him to not commit his crime," she wrote. "I didnt know."

Abbott said the gunman wrote about his intentions on Facebook. A spokesman for Meta, Facebook's parent company, [said the gunman's private one-to-one messages](#) were discovered after the shooting.

Abbott said that in the first of three messages, about 30 minutes before the school shooting, [Ramos wrote](#), "I'm going to shoot my grandmother."

Shortly after, he wrote, "I shot my grandmother."

And finally: "I'm going to shoot an elementary school."

He allegedly sent similarly chilling text messages to a girl he met online describing how he had just shot his grandmother and was going to shoot up an elementary school.

The 15-year-old girl, who lives in Frankfurt, Germany, said she began chatting with Ramos on a social media app on May 9. She said she spoke daily on FaceTime with him and also communicated with him on other apps.

In their conversations, she said he asked about her life in Germany. "He looked happy and comfortable talking to me," the girl said. She said he told her he spent a lot of time alone at home.

There were other text messages, however, that alarmed her. In one case, she said, he told her that he "threw dead cats at people's houses."

She said she got the impression that he kept to himself.

"Every time I talked to him," she said, "he never had plans with his friends."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 Arrest: mass violence at school threat
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/maryland-mass-violence-threat-elementary-school

GIST	<p>A Maryland man has been arrested after making several threats of mass violence against an elementary school and a local business, authorities said Wednesday.</p> <p>Earl Benjamin Washington, 46, of Lexington Park, was arrested in St. Mary's County, the Charles County Sheriff's Office said.</p> <p>On Tuesday, Washington called a business in White Plains and Gale-Bailey Elementary School and made violent threats, authorities said.</p> <p>"The calls to the specific locations are related to people he knows and is believed to be domestic-related," the sheriff's office said.</p> <p>The threats came on the same day an 18-year-old gunman killed 21 people at a Uvalde, Texas elementary school, including 19 children. In response, the Charles County Sheriff's Office said it will increase its presence at area schools for the remainder of the school year.</p> <p>"Although there is no specific threat to our schools at this time, officers will be there to provide support, comfort, and security for our students and staff. We are with you all," the sheriff's office said.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/25 El Salvador extends anti-gang emergency
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/el-salvador-extends-anti-gang-emergency-month-84984934
GIST	<p>SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador -- El Salvador's congress granted a request Wednesday by President Nayib Bukele for a second extension of the country's anti-gang emergency decree.</p> <p>The vote extends for 30 more days the state of emergency that was originally issued for one month in late March and then extended in April for another month.</p> <p>Bukele's security minister, Gustavo Villatoro, vowed that the government's "war" on gangs will continue, even though the homicide rate has dropped sharply.</p> <p>"This war is going to continue for as long as necessary and to the extent that the public continues to demand it," Villatoro said. "We are going to continue to confront this cancer, and we have said it before and we stand by it, this war will continue until the gangs are eradicated from the territory of El Salvador."</p> <p>The measure was approved with 67 votes in the 84-seat congress, where Bukele's party holds a majority.</p> <p>Bukele has used emergency powers to round up about 34,500 suspected gang members following a spate of killings in March.</p> <p>Rights groups have criticized the measures, saying arrests are often arbitrary, based on a person's appearance or where they live.</p> <p>Polls suggest the emergency decree has strong support among Salvadorans tired of killings and extortion.</p> <p>The measure came after a spate of homicides in late March, when gangs were blamed for 62 killings in a single weekend, a level of violence the country of 6.5 million people had not seen in years.</p> <p>But the original justification for the measures — the surge in homicides — has subsided.</p> <p>"Whether there is a legal justification, and obviously there isn't, Articles 29 and 30 of the constitution are very clear about the causes that can trigger a state of emergency, and the causes have disappeared," said Ruth Eleonora López, a lawyer and activist with the civic group Cristosal.</p> <p>The measure restricts the right to gather, to be informed of rights and to have access to a lawyer. It extends to 15 days the time that someone can be held without charges.</p>

Bukele has also established a raft of other measures. Among other things, they lengthened sentences and reduced the age of criminal responsibility to 12.

El Salvador's congress has authorized prison sentences of 10 to 15 years for news media that reproduce or disseminate messages from the gangs, alarming press freedom groups.

Gang members held at Salvadoran prisons have been put on reduced food rations, denied mattresses and frog-marched around.

Rights groups have expressed concerns that innocent people are being caught up in sweeps targeting the notorious violent street gangs.

But Villatoro seemed unlikely to be swayed by human rights arguments. Calling gangs "a cancer that won't be eradicated with chemotherapy," he said, "We need more time to continue eradicating this cancer from all of our country's communities."

Gangs control swaths of territory through brutality and fear. They have driven thousands to emigrate to save their own lives or the lives of their children who are forcibly recruited.

The gangs' power is strongest in El Salvador's poorest neighborhoods, where the state has long been absent. They are a drain on the economy, extorting money from even the lowest earners and forcing businesses that can't or won't pay to close.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 Onlookers urged police charge: 'go in there'
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/gunman-kills-19-children-texas-school-rampage-84958373
GIST	<p>UVALDE, Texas -- Frustrated onlookers urged police officers to charge into the Texas elementary school where a gunman's rampage killed 19 children and two teachers, witnesses said Wednesday, as investigators worked to track the massacre that lasted upwards of 40 minutes and ended when the 18-year-old shooter was killed by a Border Patrol team.</p> <p>"Go in there! Go in there!" nearby women shouted at the officers soon after the attack began, said Juan Carranza, 24, who saw the scene from outside his house, across the street from Robb Elementary School in the close-knit town of Uvalde. Carranza said the officers did not go in.</p> <p>Javier Cazares, whose fourth grade daughter, Jacklyn Cazares, was killed in the attack, said he raced to the school when he heard about the shooting, arriving while police were still gathered outside the building.</p> <p>Upset that police were not moving in, he raised the idea of charging into the school with several other bystanders.</p> <p>"Let's just rush in because the cops aren't doing anything like they are supposed to," he said. "More could have been done."</p> <p>"They were unprepared," he added.</p> <p>Minutes earlier, Carranza had watched as Salvador Ramos crashed his truck into a ditch outside the school, grabbed his AR-15-style semi-automatic rifle and shot at two people outside a nearby funeral home who ran away uninjured.</p> <p>Officials say he "encountered" a school district security officer outside the school, though there were conflicting reports from authorities on whether the men exchanged gunfire. After running inside, he fired on two arriving Uvalde police officers who were outside the building, said Texas Department of Public Safety spokesperson Travis Considine. The police officers were injured.</p>

After entering the school, Ramos charged into one classroom and began to kill.

He “barricaded himself by locking the door and just started shooting children and teachers that were inside that classroom,” Lt. Christopher Olivarez of the Department of Public Safety told CNN. “It just shows you the complete evil of the shooter.”

All those killed were in the same classroom, he said.

Department of Public Safety Director Steve McCraw told reporters that 40 minutes to an hour elapsed from when Ramos opened fire on the school security officer to when the tactical team shot him, though a department spokesman said later that they could not give a solid estimate of how long the gunman was in the school or when he was killed.

“The bottom line is law enforcement was there,” McCraw said. “They did engage immediately. They did contain (Ramos) in the classroom.”

Meanwhile, a law enforcement official familiar with the investigation said the Border Patrol agents had trouble breaching the classroom door and had to get a staff member to open the room with a key. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly about the ongoing investigation.

Carranza said the officers should have entered the school sooner.

“There were more of them. There was just one of him,” he said.

Uvalde is a largely Latino town of some 16,000 people about 75 miles (120 kilometers) from the Mexican border. Robb Elementary, which has nearly 600 students in second, third and fourth grades, is a single-story brick structure in a mostly residential neighborhood of modest homes.

Before attacking the school, Ramos shot and wounded his grandmother at the home they shared, authorities said.

Neighbor Gilbert Gallegos, 82, who lives across the street and has known the family for decades, said he was puttering in his yard when he heard the shots.

Ramos ran out the front door and across the small yard to the truck parked in front of the house. He seemed panicked, Gallegos said, and had trouble getting the truck out of park.

Then he raced away: “He spun out, I mean fast,” spraying gravel in the air.

His grandmother emerged covered in blood: “She says, ‘Berto, this is what he did. He shot me.’” She was hospitalized.

Gallegos, whose wife called 911, said he had heard no arguments before or after the shots, and knew of no history of bullying or abuse of Ramos, who he rarely saw.

Investigators also shed no light on Ramos' motive for the attack, which also left at least 17 people wounded. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said Ramos, a resident of the small town about 85 miles (135 kilometers) west of San Antonio, had no known criminal or mental health history.

“We don’t see a motive or catalyst right now,” said McCraw of the Department of Public Safety.

Ramos legally bought the rifle and a second one like it last week, just after his birthday, authorities said.

About a half-hour before the mass shooting, Ramos sent the first of three online messages warning about his plans, Abbott said.

Ramos wrote that he was going to shoot his grandmother, then that he had shot the woman. In the last note, sent about 15 minutes before he reached Robb Elementary, he said he was going to shoot up an elementary school, according to Abbott. Investigators said Ramos did not specify which school.

Ramos sent the private, one-to-one text messages via Facebook, said company spokesman Andy Stone. It was not clear who received the messages.

Grief engulfed Uvalde as the details emerged.

The dead included Eliahna Garcia, an outgoing 10-year-old who loved to sing, dance and play basketball; a fellow fourth-grader, Xavier Javier Lopez, who had been eagerly awaiting a summer of swimming; and a teacher, Eva Mireles, whose husband is an officer with the school district's police department.

"You can just tell by their angelic smiles that they were loved," Uvalde Schools Superintendent Hal Harrell said, fighting back tears as he recalled the children and teachers killed.

The tragedy was the latest in a seemingly unending wave of mass shootings across the U.S. in recent years. Just 10 days earlier, 10 Black people were shot to death in a racist attack at a Buffalo, New York, supermarket.

The attack was the deadliest school shooting in the U.S. since a gunman killed 20 children and six adults at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut, in December 2012.

Amid calls for tighter restrictions on firearms, the Republican governor repeatedly talked about mental health struggles among Texas young people and argued that tougher gun laws in Chicago, New York and California are ineffective.

Democrat Beto O'Rourke, who is running against Abbott for governor, interrupted Wednesday's news conference, calling the tragedy "predictable." Pointing his finger at Abbott, he said: "This is on you until you choose to do something different. This will continue to happen." O'Rourke was escorted out as some in the room yelled at him. Uvalde Mayor Don McLaughlin yelled that O'Rourke was a "sick son of a bitch."

Texas has some of the most gun-friendly laws in the nation and has been the site of some of the deadliest shootings in the U.S. over the past five years.

"I just don't know how people can sell that type of a gun to a kid 18 years old," Siria Arizmendi, the aunt of victim Eliahna Garcia, said angrily through tears. "What is he going to use it for but for that purpose?"

President Joe Biden said Wednesday that "the Second Amendment is not absolute" as he called for new limitations on guns in the wake of the massacre.

But the prospects for reform of the nation's gun regulations appeared dim. Repeated attempts over the years to expand background checks and enact other curbs have run into Republican opposition in Congress.

The shooting came days before the National Rifle Association annual convention was set to begin in Houston, with the Texas governor and both of the state's Republican U.S. senators scheduled to speak.

Dillon Silva, whose nephew was in a classroom, said students were watching the Disney movie "Moana" when they heard several loud pops and a bullet shattered a window. Moments later, their teacher saw the attacker stride past.

"Oh, my God, he has a gun!" the teacher shouted twice, according to Silva. "The teacher didn't even have time to lock the door," he said.

	<p>The close-knit community, built around a shaded central square, includes many families who have lived there for generations.</p> <p>Lorena Auguste was substitute teaching at Uvalde High School when she heard about the shooting and began frantically texting her niece, a fourth grader at Robb Elementary. Eventually she found out the girl was OK.</p> <p>But that night, her niece had a question.</p> <p>“Why did they do this to us?” the girl asked. “We’re good kids. We didn’t do anything wrong.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/25 Columbine to Robb: 169 killed in shootings
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/deadliest-us-school-shootings-84949424
GIST	<p>Mass shooters have killed hundreds of people throughout U.S. history in realms like stores, theaters and workplaces, but it is in schools and colleges where the carnage reverberates perhaps most keenly — places filled with children of tender ages, older students aspiring to new heights and the teachers planting the seeds of knowledge, their journeys all cut short.</p> <p>If a mass shooting is defined as resulting in the death of four or more people, not including the perpetrator, 169 people have died in 14 such events connected to U.S. schools and colleges — from 1999's Columbine High School massacre to Tuesday's shooting in Texas. That's according to a database compiled by The Associated Press, USA Today and Northeastern University, and to other AP reporting:</p> <p>ROBB ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, May 2022, 21 dead An 18-year-old gunman opened fire Tuesday at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, killing 19 children and two adults, officials said. Law enforcement killed the attacker.</p> <p>OXFORD HIGH SCHOOL, November 2021, 4 dead A sophomore student is accused of killing four people and wounding others at his school in Oxford, Michigan, near Detroit. His trial is set for September. His parents are charged with involuntary manslaughter; authorities say they ignored warning signs.</p> <p>SANTA FE HIGH SCHOOL, May 2018, 10 dead A shooter opened fire at a Houston-area high school, killing 10 people, most of them students, authorities said. The 17-year-old suspect has been charged with murder.</p> <p>MARJORY STONEMAN DOUGLAS HIGH SCHOOL, February 2018, 17 dead An attack left 14 students and three staff members dead at the school in Parkland, Florida, and injured many others. The 20-year-old suspect was charged with murder.</p> <p>UMPQUA COMMUNITY COLLEGE, October 2015, 9 dead A man killed nine people at the school in Roseburg, Oregon, and wounded nine others, then killed himself.</p> <p>MARYSVILLE-PILCHUCK HIGH SCHOOL, October 2014, 4 dead A 15-year-old used text messages to draw several cousins and friends to his cafeteria table at Marysville-Pilchuck High School in Washington state. He fatally shot four of them before killing himself.</p> <p>UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA, May 2014, 6 dead A 22-year-old college student frustrated over sexual rejections fatally stabbed or shot six students near the school in Isla Vista, California, and injured several others before he killed himself.</p> <p>SANDY HOOK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, December 2012, 27 dead A 19-year-old man killed his mother at their home in Newtown, Connecticut, then went to the nearby Sandy Hook Elementary School and killed 20 first graders and six educators. He took his own life.</p>

OIKOS UNIVERSITY, April 2012, 7 dead

A former nursing student fatally shot seven people at the small private college in East Oakland, California. He died in prison in 2019.

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY, February 2008, 5 dead

A 27-year-old former student shot and killed five people and wounded more than 20 others at the school in DeKalb, Illinois, before killing himself.

VIRGINIA TECH, April 2007, 32 dead

A 23-year-old student killed 32 people on the campus in Blacksburg, Virginia, in April 2007; more than two dozen others were wounded. The gunman then killed himself.

WEST NICKEL MINES AMISH SCHOOL, October 2006, 5 dead

A 32-year-old man entered an Amish schoolhouse near Lancaster, Pennsylvania, dismissed the boys, bound the girls, and fatally shot five of them before killing himself. Five others were wounded.

RED LAKE HIGH SCHOOL, March 2005, 9 dead

A 16-year-old student killed his grandfather and the man's companion at their Minnesota home, then went to nearby Red Lake High School, where he killed five students, a teacher and a security guard before shooting himself.

COLUMBINE HIGH SCHOOL, April 1999, 13 dead

Two students killed 12 of their peers and one teacher at the school in Littleton, Colorado, and injured many others before killing themselves.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	05/25 Timeline of Texas school mass shooting
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/timeline-shooting-texas-elementary-school-unfolded/story?id=84966910
GIST	<p>What began as a milestone marking adulthood ended in tragedy after a suspected gunman used the AR-15 style rifle he purchased days after he turned 18, authorities said.</p> <p>Uvalde High School student Salvador Ramos allegedly purchased two assault rifles just days after turning 18 and used them to carry out the second-worst school shooting in U.S. history -- all within a span of eight days, authorities said.</p> <p>Ramos was known for fighting and threatening fellow students, some classmates told ABC News. He allegedly exhibited unusual behavior such as threatening classmates and claiming to have cut scars into his face, classmates said.</p> <p>Authorities said during a press conference Wednesday afternoon that Ramos had dropped out of school.</p> <p>Twenty-one people, including 19 third and fourth grade children, were killed in the attack, law enforcement officials said. Two teachers were killed, too. Another 17 people were wounded, including three law enforcement officers.</p> <p>This is how the shooting unfolded:</p> <p>March 20 Ramos moves in with his 66-year-old grandmother, Celia, Steve McCraw, director of the Texas Department of Public Safety, said during a press conference Wednesday afternoon.</p> <p>May 16 Ramos turns 18, according to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.</p> <p>May 17</p>

Ramos buys a semi-automatic rifle at a local sporting goods store called Oasis Outback, McCraw said.

May 18

Ramos purchases 375 rounds of ammunition for that rifle, McCraw said. It is not known where he purchased that ammunition.

Friday

Ramos buys a second semi-automatic rifle at the same store, McCraw said.

Tuesday

Morning: An Instagram account that law enforcement sources tell ABC News they believe is connected to Ramos sent another user on the social media platform a photo of a gun laying on a bed, according to a user who shared direct messages from the suspect's alleged account with ABC News.

11 a.m.: Ramos allegedly had three communications on the social media platform Meta describes as private one-to-one text messages. One message to an unknown recipient stated that he was going to shoot his grandmother, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said in a press conference Tuesday.

Before 11:30 a.m.: Another one-on-one message said he had shot his grandmother, and the third said he was going to shoot an elementary school, but did not specify the school, Abbott said.

Ramos then shot his 66-year-old grandmother in the head at their residence, and she was able to run across the street and call police, McCraw said. She was taken to the hospital via helicopter and is still in critical condition, McCraw said.

Ramos drove about 2 miles to Robb Elementary in his grandmother's truck crashing the vehicle outside the school, McCraw said. He exits the vehicle with a backpack and rifle, authorities said.

11:32 a.m.: The gunman went toward the west side of the campus, which is a back door, but as he was approaching the door, a Uvalde Independent School District police officer attempted to confront the gunman him, McCraw said.

Ramos shot the school district officer, authorities said.

At one point, students heard banging on a window before their teacher saw the shooter with a "big gun," a fourth-grade student who was inside the school at the time said in an interview with ABC News, describing the "nonstop" gunshots that followed.

After Ramos entered the school through a back door, he went into a classroom that was connected internally to a second classroom and began shooting, authorities said.

"That's where the carnage began," McCraw said.

Law enforcement then converged into the classroom and Ramos was shot and killed by an officer, authorities said.

11:43 a.m.: Robb Elementary School posts to Facebook that the campus has gone under lockdown "due to gunshots in the area."

12:17 p.m.: Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District announces the shooting on Twitter.

12:30 p.m.: Uvalde Fire Department scanner traffic calls on "additional firemen need to respond to Mill Street to establish a perimeter to assist Uvalde EMS and Uvalde PD."

1:06 p.m.: Police report that the suspected shooter was killed by officers at the scene after they broke into the classroom.

HEADLINE	05/25 WA recovers \$6.6M stolen in jobless claims
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/washington-recovers-66-million-stolen-pandemic-unemployment-scam/MELQ77YOOZCCZNAYGUSJNA26J4/
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash. — An additional \$6.6 million that was stolen from Washington’s State Employment Security Department during the pandemic has been recovered by Attorney General Bob Ferguson’s office.</p> <p>The stolen money was deposited into JPMorgan Chase bank accounts. A King County Superior Court judge ordered the bank to return the money to Washington state.</p> <p>The attorney general’s Complex Litigation Division has now used forfeiture laws to recover \$18.8 million stolen from ESD.</p> <p>During the pandemic, identity data obtained from data breaches was used by fraud rings to steal billions from at least 11 states, including Washington state.</p> <p>Ferguson’s investigation searched for bank accounts where participants in fraud rings had not yet withdrawn the stolen money and then launched an effort to reclaim the funds for Washington state.</p> <p>The AG’s office expects additional funds will be recovered from other banks and returned to the state ESD in the months ahead.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	05/25 Seattle U District light rail station stabbings
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/2-people-reportedly-stabbed-at-u-district-light-rail-station
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Seattle Police are looking for a suspect who stabbed two people at a light rail station in the U District.</p> <p>The stabbing was reported after 6 p.m. in the 4300 block of Brooklyn Ave NE.</p> <p>A 16-year-old and 19-year-old victim were sent to Harborview Medical Center for their injuries. The 19-year-old was in critical condition, according to Seattle Police.</p> <p>Police are searching the area for a suspect.</p> <p>The University of Washington sent out an alert to students describing the suspect, saying he may be on campus.</p> <p>The suspect was described by UW as a white man around 5'8" with medium build who was last seen wearing blue jeans, a black hat and a black shirt.</p> <p>According to witnesses, a fight between the suspect and victims escalated and lead to the stabbing.</p> <p>Seattle Police said there is no ongoing threat to the public.</p>
Return to Top	

Information From Online Communities and Unclassified Sources/InFOCUS is a situational awareness report published daily by the Washington State Fusion Center.

If you no longer wish to receive this report, please submit an email to intake@wsfc.wa.gov and enter UNSUBSCRIBE InFOCUS in the Subject line.

DISCLAIMER - the articles highlighted within InFOCUS is for informational purposes only and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Washington State Fusion Center, the City of Seattle, the Seattle Police Department or the Washington State Patrol and have been included only for ease of reference and academic purposes.

FAIR USE Notice All rights to these copyrighted items are reserved. Articles and graphics have been placed within for educational and discussion purposes only, in compliance with 'Fair Use' criteria established in Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976. The principle of 'Fair Use' was established as law by Section 107 of The Copyright Act of 1976. 'Fair Use' legally eliminates the need to obtain permission or pay royalties for the use of previously copyrighted materials if the purposes of display include 'criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, and research.' Section 107 establishes four criteria for determining whether the use of a work in any particular case qualifies as a 'fair use'. A work used does not necessarily have to satisfy all four criteria to qualify as an instance of 'fair use'. Rather, 'fair use' is determined by the overall extent to which the cited work does or does not substantially satisfy the criteria in their totality. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes of your own that go beyond 'fair use,' you must obtain permission from the copyright owner. For more information go to: [<http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>](http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml)

THIS DOCUMENT MAY CONTAIN COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL. COPYING AND DISSEMINATION IS PROHIBITED WITHOUT PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNERS.

Source: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>

[Return to Top](#)